

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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**ROCK
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news**

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today
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Behind the scandal of privatisation

Barely a week goes by without further scandals surrounding the privatised utilities. Takeover bids are coming in fast and furious in an unseemly scramble for the regional electricity companies (RECs), those private monopolies with their captive markets and guaranteed high profits. The electricity industry is being put out to private auction for the benefit of multinational companies, offering windfall gains to the large financial institutions which own most of the shares while turning the directors of the RECs into privatisation millionaires overnight. Nothing, it seems, can stop the corruption and greed which have become the hallmarks of a parasitic and decaying British capitalism.

Over the summer the staggering incompetence of the water companies led to millions of people being faced with water shortages, hosepipe bans and threats of being cut off. 20 per cent of water on average leaks out from old pipes in this country – around 702 million gallons a day. Yet investment has fallen some 30 per cent over two years. Yorkshire Water, which has threatened to cut off water supplies, loses the largest amount – 103 million gallons a day, around 30 per cent of supplies. It has spent only £46.1m on capital investment since privatisation while accumulated profits have reached £658m. Its chairman's salary has been increased by 169 per cent over the same period. Overall water companies have increased their prices by 77 per cent. As a result the profits of the 10 privatised water companies are predicted to reach a staggering £2.07bn by next April, up from £658m when they were sold off in December 1989. Shareholders, mainly the large City institutions, have received £2.5bn in dividends, earning more than four times the rate of inflation over the period.

The profits of the privatised utilities, the massive windfall gains for shareholders, the obscene salaries of the directors are all easy targets, and even 'New Labour' feels comfortable in joining the attack. However, behind the obvious affront to any reasonable set of values lies something even more pernicious and damaging.

Privatisation is an ideologically-motivated attack on the working class. It proclaims the superiority of the 'market economy' over collectively organised and planned production, of capitalism over socialism. It promotes a system of exploitation and gross inequality as being not only the most productive and 'efficient' but in the long-term interests of all classes. So successful has this ideological assault been that it is only the excesses of the 'market economy' of privatisation which are open to question.

Large sections of the 'socialist movement' are even persuaded that a 'market econ-

omy' is an essential prerequisite for an efficient socialist economy. Yet the excesses of privatisation, of the 'market economy' are not incidental, but are the inevitable product of the uncontrollable forces of capitalism. State-organised production of the basic utilities and state welfare were necessary, after the great depression of the 1930s and the ravages of two world wars, precisely to save the capitalist system from destruction, from socialism. The privatisation of the basic utilities and the dismantling of state welfare will return us to those very conditions of an uncontrolled capitalism, with mass poverty and vast inequalities of wealth, which existed before the Second World War.

Privatisation is an attack on the living standards of large sections of the working class. Capital has gained enormously at the expense of labour. Productivity gains and high profits have resulted mainly from increasing the exploitation of workers by massive job losses, intensification of labour and lengthening the working day for those in work, with often reduced wages and deteriorating conditions. Since 1984, the work force has been cut by 45 per cent in British Telecom, nearly 40 per cent for British Gas, over 30 per cent in the water industry, and more than 20 per cent in the electricity industry since 1989 with further large job cuts planned.

Privatisation increased inequality and redistributed wealth from the public to the private sector, from poorer sections of the working class to well paid workers, the middle classes and the rich. The revenues from the sale of the privatised utilities were used to finance tax cuts for the better off. All the main utilities were sold off at prices which significantly undervalued the assets and gave windfall gains to those who could afford to buy shares and, in particular, the City financial institutions which run pension funds and the insurance industry. Their gains are spectacular. The total stockmarket value of the water companies is £13.8bn, compared to £5.24bn when privatised in December 1989. That of the RECs is £15.48bn, compared with £5.18bn on privatisation.

These losses can never be retrieved. Neither will the profits which go every year to the institutional shareholders of the multinational companies which now run the privatised utilities. The cutbacks in state welfare, the refusal to pay adequate pensions for the growing numbers of old people, the growing poverty and unemployment are the other side of the coin which is privatisation. So are the corruption and greed which have become an ever present feature of the social and political culture of Britain.

The government is well aware of the widespread dis-

gust with the running of the privatised utilities. That is why it was forced to set up the Greenbury committee to look into the matter. It was not meant to be serious. The committee was composed of the highest paid executives of British industry. It recommended nothing that would curb the activities of the privatised utilities, as subsequent events have shown, and countered the attacks on the composition of its own committee on the grounds that 'not even the Labour Party has criticised the salaries of successful chairmen'. A point that Jack Cunningham, Labour Shadow Trade and Industry Secretary confirmed when he said he had 'no objection to high rewards for successful businessmen'. It was the 'unacceptable abuses' which were the problem.

However the 'abuses' are at the root of the system. At the end of July, Hanson plc paid £2.5bn for Eastern Electricity. This well-known asset stripper will cut investment, and use the guaranteed profits and Eastern's knowledge of the electricity industry to expand Hanson plc's electricity interests and profits worldwide. The deal was arranged by the merchant bank Rothschild. The chairman of Eastern Electricity, James Smith, is a director of Rothschild. He will make more than £1m on share options. The Energy Secretary at the time of privatisation, Lord Wakeham, also sits on the board of Rothschild. The whole setup is an 'abuse'.

The National Grid given to the RECs at the time of privatisation is estimated to be worth between £3.5bn and £5bn. It was valued at about £1.4bn at the time of privatisation. When it is floated in December the chairman stands to make nearly £2m, other directors £100,000s. The government has admitted undervaluing the grid at the time of privatisation and has tried to buy off discontent by contemptuously offering a rebate of £50 to all electricity consumers. £2m for the chairman, vast dividends for the shareholders, and £50 for the working class.

Privatisation itself is an 'unacceptable abuse'. To end that abuse requires ending the capitalist system which has produced it. ■

COMMUNIST FORUMS

A series of public discussions of communist politics introduced by Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!

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A celebration
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London: Sunday 8 October, 2pm,
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£1/50p
Creche available on application.

Manchester: Wednesday 25th
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House, Mount St, Manchester.

Tel: 0171 837 1688 for details

News



Lincoln road protest

JIM CRAVEN

Three people have been arrested following a daring protest against the building of a new road in Lincoln. The three were perched 80ft above the ground as the rest of the building, on the site of the new road, was demolished. At one point the demolition machine ripped off a set of steps close to the demonstrators to prevent other protesters joining them. The flimsy tower on which the three sat 'shook like an earthquake' according to one of them, Paul North. They have been charged under the Criminal Justice Act and bound over not to re-enter the site.

For their part, the demonstrators are considering suing the demolition company and the two council Health and Safety Officers who, they claim, stood by and gave the go-ahead for demolition to continue while the protesters were in the building.

The brave action of the three has sparked off a campaign both against the new road and against traffic pollution in the City. Dave Kane, from Lincoln Green Party said 'The Labour City Council, by granting permission for the new road has condemned the west end of Lincoln to increasing levels of congestion and pollution. Life, already blighted, will become unbearable. It will no longer be acceptable for the two schools in the

area to remain open'.

The Labour/Liberal County Council claim the road is needed for access to the proposed University of Lincolnshire. Paul North said 'the university campus, a third of which is given over to car parking, was mooted as a "Centre of Environmental Excellence". They keep quiet about this now'. The cost of the new road has escalated from £6 million to over £9 million and may have to be built in two stages because the council have run out of money. This will create further traffic chaos in Lincoln. Recently it was revealed that the road contract has been awarded to Beatty's, the same company that is building the University.

The protesters, now formed into the Brayford Road Action Group (BRAG), are demanding that all new road building in the area be stopped until a full assessment of pollution levels has been made. Levels of nitrogen dioxide already exceed EC guidelines and BRAG expect the new road will push the pollution even further. BRAG's petition for a full pollution survey has attracted wide support across the city. As they say: 'we are raising awareness on every level. From rooftop to petition; BRAG aim to stop the road. Get involved!'

The Brayford 3 appear in court again on 22 November. Messages of support to BRAG, 73 Newland Street West, Lincoln.

Pensioners Notes

RENE WALLER

Once again, it's time to let everyone know what pensioners are doing to defend their own interests and by so doing help the general struggle against the dismemberment of the welfare state.

Pensioners are justly proud of the principled struggle they have made which has won respect and stopped any tendency to regard them as an easy target for cuts in benefits.

The government and its backers have understood that we know what we want. We will not be tricked into accepting means-testing of the basic pension, whatever the bribes offered. However, New Labour is so drunk on its success in abandoning any pretence of socialism, or defending the welfare state, they seem incapable of understanding that pensioners mean what they say. We cannot be persuaded to blindly support any policy, however reactionary, simply to be anti-Tory.

This government and any like it, whatever the label, would be delighted to pay improved pensions to a selected few as a favour, on proof of special need. This is not what we pensioners and our movement

have fought for. We underline our desire to preserve our independence and dignity whatever our age.

Despite some very inclement weather, we've campaigned on the streets collecting signatures and support from all age groups for our demands. We've also run many well-attended meetings and rallies and learned with pleasure that our movement is growing and becoming better organised.

Some action groups, including my own, have travelled to Brighton to give support to pre-conference rallies held to ensure our views are known.

I think another question all pensioners are asking is 'Who pays when long-term care is needed? If both house and savings are demanded as payment, what happens to the partner left to struggle on?' This dilemma causes many frail people to avoid seeking help. What happens when one partner needs full-time care and the other is left unable to purchase enough assistance to remain independent? Full-time care costs a minimum of £250 a week – even in a comparatively rich, imperialist country there are an increasing number of people with insoluble problems. ■

Reclaim the streets

HANNAH CALLER

The last of the summer months saw ongoing direct action throughout the country: against road-building and environmental destruction, against the ever-increasing polluting traffic, against live animal exports, against the Criminal Justice Act; and in support of freedom of movement, the right to party, the right to demonstrate and dissent.

■ Critical Mass, which fills the streets with cyclists to exclude traffic from areas as they ride through, now sees hundreds of cyclists gather in many towns and cities all over Britain on a monthly basis.



■ On 23 July, a huge party took place in Upper Street, Islington. The location was kept secret until the last moment. Tripods were erected in under two minutes at the three exits to the area, and from then on, eight hours of relaxation and partying for hundreds of people, in a traffic-free zone, with food, drink, live music and a beach for children to play on.



August: Greenwich streets reclaimed

■ On 4 September, in the morning rush hour, Reclaim the Streets successfully reclaimed part of Streatham High Road (the second most polluted spot in the UK, according to a recent Friends of the Earth study) in south London. The police are shedding their gentle approach to roadblocks and very heavily-handedly tried to prevent the tripods going up... in vain.

■ On 11 September, environmental activists joined forces with people from the mining communities, ex-miners and Ann Scargill to protest at Michael Heseltine's involvement in open cast mining. They applied to Northamptonshire County Council for permission to mine Heseltine's garden, and he woke up that morning to the sound of them digging.

For details of Reclaim the Streets ring 0171 713 5874. Critical Mass meets in London at 5.45pm on the last Friday of every month outside the National Film Theatre, under Waterloo Bridge.

..... Ireland

GIBRALTAR THREE - Britain condemned



Daniel McCann



Mairead Farrell



Sean Savage

MAXINE WILLIAMS

The British government has been dealt a severe political blow by the European court judgment that Britain had used unnecessary force in killing the Gibraltar Three in 1988. The government reacted furiously to this decision finding it 'incomprehensible' and asserting that they would ignore it. In contrast, the relatives of the dead and their sup-

porters in Ireland found it quite comprehensible that the shooting dead of three unarmed people by the SAS was murder.

The European judgment, one of a long list against Britain, touched the Tories on two highly sensitive spots. Firstly, Mrs Thatcher's Cabinet had sanctioned the SAS operation and the whole government establishment was involved in a detailed cover-up after the murders. This cover-up

succeeded through the inquest and the subsequent judgement by the European Commission of Human Rights judgment that the operation had been within the law. Now, seven years later, it has unravelled. Secondly, anti-European feeling is running high in the Tory Party and this blow to national pride ('the British government has an inalienable right to murder anyone it chooses') re-opens the old wounds about Europe.

The Court found that the key unsatisfactory issue in the operation against the three was the question of why they had been allowed to cross the border into Gibraltar and why the SAS had been told they had a remote control device for a car bomb. They criticised the intelligence assumptions made which underlay the shooting: namely that there was a car bomb controlled by a remote control device and that the three were armed. They held that the briefing to this effect received by the SAS made it likely that they would shoot the three.

The findings are another confirmation that in relation to the Irish, the British government has consistently operated a shoot-to-kill policy. It is a limited judgment in the sense that it merely casts doubt on the efficiency of the plan against the three rather than challenging the whole basis of the security operation. A mass of evidence exists to show that they were under continual surveillance, known to be unarmed and known not to be in control of a car bomb. It was murder pure and simple.

No peace for the nationalists



RUC Land Rover drives into protesters on July 4

SARAH BOND

Since the IRA announced its ceasefire on 31 August 1994, John Major's much-lauded 'peace process' has produced a fair amount of process but very little peace for the nationalist people of the north of Ireland.

Britain's statelet remains a ghetto for the Catholic working class, with unemployment rates twice as high as for Protestants.

Nationalist homes are still petrol-bombed by Loyalist thugs: a recent attack forced a nationalist couple and their four children out of their new home in a Loyalist area of north Belfast. The RUC remains a sectarian force, harassing and criminalising those who oppose British rule: recently a prominent nationalist attending hospital for cancer treatment was forcibly ejected by the RUC when the Duchess of Kent arrived for a visit. Hundreds of British soldiers remain on Irish streets. Hundreds of Irish political prisoners remain in British gaols.

One year into the ceasefire, the British government has not even commenced all-party

talks. Its excuse is that it requires the decommissioning of IRA arms. During a recent trip to Ireland, Blair gave his full backing to this. He gave an interview to *The Irish Times* in which his outspoken support for the Unionist veto was too much even for Kevin McNamara, former spokesman on the north of Ireland and no friend of the Republican movement. McNamara promptly resigned from the shadow cabinet, citing Blair's 'slavish' adherence to government policy in Ireland as a reason. While in Ireland, Blair declined to meet with members of Sinn Fein. Labour Party policy on Ireland, as on a number of issues, is now firmly to the right of the Liberal Democrats, whose leader Paddy Ashdown met a leading Sinn Fein member at the party conference this year.

The IRA has dismissed the British government's precondition for talks: 'Given...that they and their Loyalist death squad allies hold the largest stock of licensed and unlicensed weapons, the demands of an IRA handover of weapons is ludicrous. There is no possibility of the IRA meeting these demands.'

Irish prisoners' court victory

NICKI JAMESON

For the seventh time in his two years as Home Secretary, Michael Howard was found by the High Court to have acted illegally. Coming the day after the European Court of Human Rights' ruling on the Gibraltar murders, a judgement in favour of five of Britain's longest serving Irish POWs was particularly embarrassing for the government.

Brendan Dowd, Noel Gibson, Stephen Nordone, Sean Kinsella and Paul Norney are now in their 21st year of imprisonment. Paul Norney was recently transferred to Maghaberry in the north of Ireland, following a sustained campaign by his wife Briege and supporters in England and Ireland. The others remain in top security prisons in Britain. All five were sentenced to life imprisonment in 1976 for attempted murder and other offences, with a recommendation that they serve a minimum of 20 years.

The High Court judge Mr Dyson ruled that the Home

Secretary acted unreasonably by waiting until after the 20 years had elapsed before allowing the prisoners to begin the process of applying for parole, thus rendering it impossible for them to actually serve only the minimum sentence. The effect of the judgement is not, however, the immediate release of the five men. They will still be subjected to the lengthy parole process and will only be eligible for release after the Parole Board considers their cases in December. As their solicitor, Gareth Pierce, put it: 'This is a victory for others, not for them'.

The ruling does not effect only POWs but is also of relevance to at least 700 other prisoners serving discretionary life sentences (ie those imposed for offences other than murder, for which the life sentence is mandatory). However, the cases of Republican prisoners are particularly strong in the light of the ceasefire, as the state can no longer argue that they continue to pose a threat to society.

Arrogant and contemptuous to the core, the Home Office is considering appealing against the judgement.

Send messages of solidarity to: Brendan Dowd (758662), HMP Whitemoor, Longhill Road, March, Cambs, PE15 0PR; Stephen Nordone (758563), HMP Frankland, Finchale Avenue, Brasside, Durham, DH1 5YD; Paul Norney (863532), HMP Maghaberry, Upper Ballynerry, Lisburn, Co Antrim, N Ireland; Noel Gibson (879225) and Sean Kinsella (758661), HMP Full Sutton, Moor Lane, York, YO4 1PS.



Howard

What we stand for

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit - that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

► In Britain today more than four million are unemployed with many people - women in particular - trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25% of the population - the majority women and children - lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the newly-privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. *The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.*

► Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. *The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.*

► While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, new laws like the Criminal Justice Act have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. *The RCG opposes the Criminal Justice Act and fights to defend democratic rights - the right to organise and protest.*

► The richest 20% of the world's population consumes 83% of its wealth and resources. It is the capitalist system which consigns billions to poverty. Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious - low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. *The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.*

► The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. *We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.*

► In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. *The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.*

► Who will defend the interests of the working class? In Britain, it is clear the Tories defend only the rich and corrupt - but the Labour Party won't defend the working class either. It wants middle class votes in the next election - and has approved many anti-working class laws, including the Criminal Justice Act. The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. *The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.*

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry. *We support the rights of the working class regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or disability.*

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally.

The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX
Telephone: 0171 837 1688

The war in the former Yugoslavia has revealed wide political differences on the Left. On these pages we reprint some of the letters we have received about the issue.

Andrew Coates makes a case against external intervention.

James Tait argues for a lifting of the arms embargo against the Bosnians.

Maxine Williams analyses the current situation.

Bosnia:

The US solution

With its operation in Yugoslavia the USA, in the guise of NATO, has militarily intervened in Europe for the first time since the Second World War. Flying more than 3500 missions against the Serbs and using Cruise missiles the USA has imposed its agenda on the region. Casualties caused by this are unknown although it is admitted that one hospital was hit. And yet, where are the demonstrations against either its interference or its use of force? Nowhere to be seen. Indeed, in so far as liberal/left opinion has been calling for years for 'something to be done' to prevent Serb aggression, it can only be supposed that a sort of embarrassed relief pervades these circles. MAXINE WILLIAMS reports.

light between the US and Germany at present. Britain and France have been comprehensively humiliated in the region. Declining imperialist powers, they could not afford to undertake the economic or military burden of serious intervention. How they will react to this remains to be seen but it may partially explain the French obsession with retaining its nuclear testing programme. The USA has achieved both a great public relations victory and a step towards its long-term aim of preventing destabilisation of the regions near Turkey as well as greater influence in Eastern Europe. Hot on the heels of its air attacks on the Serbs came the proposal to extend NATO through Eastern Europe. Relations between the US and Russia are at a low ebb and nationalist sentiment has been boosted not merely among the Serbs but among the Russians. These factors do not augur well for a peaceful entry to the 21st century. And that, rather than running around deciding who to back in the various conflicts that will emerge, is what the left should be concentrating on.



Even more in the case of Yugoslavia than the Gulf War, the fantasy has taken hold that the imperialists can be forced to behave honourably. Whilst much of the liberal/left circle has concentrated on superficial analyses of the warring parties within Yugoslavia, often plumping to support 'gallant little Bosnia', remarkably little attention has been paid to the motives of the 'Great Powers'. Yet they have self-interestedly encouraged the disintegration of Yugoslavia and made a bad situation a great deal worse. Had the left done the job of analysing the actions of its own governments then at least a section of the population might be wary of believing government lies on its foreign policy. Instead, the appearance of events that is dominant is that after years of European dithering, the good old USA has given the Serbs a bloody nose and forced them to behave more reasonably.

This legend now being commonplace has consequences, none of them good. Firstly, it legitimises the use of military intervention by the USA in the affairs of other nations. It will be difficult for those who are now silent as the Serbs get it in the neck, to start shouting about US imperialism when others, more palatable to the left, are on the receiving end of Cruise missiles. Secondly it has the effect of encouraging those nationalist political forces within the former Yugoslavia, authors of a war which has slaughtered 250,000 of its people, to continue their repulsive course of courting various external powers. The various 'proud' Serb, Croat and Muslim politicians cannot survive without arms and aid from their foreign supporters. Thirdly it allows the imperialists to impose, without any consent being sought from the peoples of the region, various partition plans which will in decades to come be a source of continuing bitterness and warfare. The peoples of the region alone have the right and the ability to decide their own fate. Indeed the history of conflicts which have made the Balkans a watchword for fratricidal slaughter is a history of various empires slugging it out over the corpses of the suffering people. Those who think Pax Americana will launch a new and hopeful chapter are either witless or malevolent.

Indeed the evidence for this came thick and fast on the ground as the US-sponsored alliance of Croatia-Bosnia used the US operation as a cover for its own rapid military advances. Tens of thousands of Serbs have been expelled from the Krajina

area of Croatia and from Western and Central Bosnia. These huge population transfers are a prelude to the partition of Bosnia, largely between Serbia and Croatia. The suffering involved in these forced population movements is no less because it is Serb displacement than it was when it concerned Croatian or Muslim populations. No ethnic grouping has a monopoly of either good or evil, although the leaderships of the forces share the latter quality in abundance.

'the history of conflicts which have made the Balkans a watchword for fratricidal slaughter is a history of various empires slugging it out over the corpses of the suffering people'



Rapid reaction

The position taken by FRFI has had the modest aim of arguing against the intervention of the big powers and attempting to unravel the motives involved. The letter from James Tait that we print on this page accuses us of 'abject cowardice and sectarian indifference' and argues that there is a fundamental difference between the Bosnian government and the Serbs or Croats, on the grounds that the former has never advocated expelling anyone from Bosnia because of their race or religion. This is a little simplistic. President Izetbegovic of Bosnia opted for independence in 1992 in the face of inevitable resistance from the large Serb minority within Bosnia. He leads the exclusively Muslim Party for Democratic Action. In such circumstances an independent Bosnia, irrespective of the multiracial character of parts, particularly urban areas, of Bosnia, had little chance of existing without being propped up exter-

nally. Whilst these facts in no way diminish the nationalist and chauvinist character of the Serb and Croat leaderships, nor would they automatically lead a socialist to rally to the cause. It is even harder to imagine why socialists should actively lobby for any external force to have the right to arm the Bosnians. If the Left had any influence on such issues it should have tried to prevent the arming of Croatia by the US/Germany and Serbia by Russia and others.

Whilst in no way belittling the commitment of those, like James Tait, who have taken aid to Bosnia, humanitarian solidarity is a different matter from giving political support to the Bosnian government, which he appears to do. The preconditions for the left to make an effective intervention on this issue would have been: that it existed as a serious force - it does not, and cannot consequently even build a movement capable of defending ethnic minorities in Britain from fascist and police attack let alone attempting to intervene in ex-Yugoslavia; that it had some effective international organisations or at least connections in order to mount pressure on the imperialist governments and try to encourage the anti-nationalist forces within the former Yugoslavia - it does not have such connections and today, in the era of unprecedented global communications, is less internationalist than in the nineteenth century.

In an ideal world, there would indeed be international organisations whose sole purpose was to try to encourage the peaceful resolution of internal conflicts. In this world, the international organisations exist to do the opposite. 'What's in it for us?' they salivate. Hence, as was revealed by John Pilger several years ago and only recently admitted by other journalists, France and Britain gave way to German lobbying for recognition of an independent Croatia (one, not the only one, cause of intensified conflict in the region) in return for being offered the bribe of opt-outs from the Maastricht treaty. So tens of thousands of Yugoslavs have died in order that the Conservative government should be allowed to deny better social benefits to British citizens. That is what international intervention means today.

We live in dangerous times when conflicts between the big powers are looming. In the former Yugoslavia we have seen repeated disagreements between Britain, France, Germany and the USA. Germany's agenda, the encouragement of the former Hapsburg territory of Slovenia and Croatia, is well served by the US intervention. All is sweetness and



As someone who has fairly recently been to Bosnia, with a convoy organised by Workers' Aid for Bosnia, I was very interested in reading what your paper had to say about the situation there, and what you believe the position of communists should be towards it.

For the most part the article, 'Bosnia: the hidden agenda' was absolutely spot-on in explaining the causes of the war and the United Nation's (ie imperialism's) power games there, and how most people are very confused by what is going on, because that is what the state, through its media puppets, wants us to be. So far so good.

But when it came to what we should do to change things, the article falls flat on its face in the usual display of abject cowardice and sectarian indifference that I (and many others) have come to expect from middle class lefty groups in this country (and, believe me, I don't want to dump the RCG/FRFI in with the rest of the lefty shower, as usually your paper is easily one of the best going! - and at least you haven't followed the twisted 'logic' of the sects like the New Communist Party and the writer of the letter on Yugoslavia (ie Greater Serbia) who seem to think that support for fascists is okay as long as some of their leaders used to be in the Communist Party and call their racially-pure empire 'Yugoslavia', or the CPGB who promote ethnic cleansing as the only solution (maybe the final solution?)).

Basically your argument seems to be that even though Serb aggression is fascist and racially motivated, and that Bosnia is a multi-ethnic nation (predominantly Muslim, but that's as much due to Serb (and Croat) ethnic

Dear FRFI,
Regarding Maxine Williams' article on Bosnia in FRFI 126 and the letter on page 15, I think we must ask ourselves how it was that alleged socialist societies can be structured in such a way that allows a Milosevic and a Tudjman to prosper? Tudjman was a partisan during World War II and went on to become a political general in post-war Yugoslavia. Milosevic, previously a banker, was by 1987 the leader of the Serbian League of Communists. Whilst the actions of the imperialists in the Balkans are self-evident, and reflect imperialism's internal nature, it appears that the catalyst for the breakup of Yugoslavia was triggered by Milosevic's attacks on the status of Kosovo within Serbia. His 'reintegration' of Kosovo and Vojvodina into Serbia, while retaining their Federal voting powers, brought the whole national issue in Yugoslavia to the fore.

To finish off, Maxine's final paragraph was an excellent piece of realism, and why I keep buying FRFI.

Anthony Bidgood, Australia

• We propose to show the BBC series of programmes about Yugoslavia at two meetings in October/November. If you would like to attend, please phone 0171 837 1688 for details.



NATO 'smart' bombs destroyed this apartment block in a Serb-held town

Real solidarity

cleansing as much as anything, and what should it matter what 'race' they are anyway?), that isn't enough to defend the Bosnian people from genocide. I mean, after all, they 'beg' for weapons from America and ask the UN to help them -- oh, well, then, obviously they don't deserve our support -- they're not politically correct enough!

Look at it this way. Imagine a gang of Combat 18 members (who, incidentally, support the Serbs and base their programme on what the Serbs are doing), had burned out the house of one of your neighbours 'cos he was Asian, what would your response be? Would you follow the logic of the article and turn your back on him saying, 'Well, look, I know it's a nasty business and all that, but there's no easy solution. Anyway, the guy's politics leave a lot to be desired -- I mean, I think he might be a Muslim and you know what reactionaries they are. And listen, he's calling for the police to stop them raping his daughter -- doesn't he realise the police are just agents of capitalism? Well, until he decides to be a socialist, there's nothing I can do -- sorry!'

We all know the Bosnian government are no angels -- nobody ever said they were -- but there's a fundamental difference between them and the Serbs. Unlike the Serbs (and, for that matter, the Croatians), the Bosnian government has never advocated expelling anyone from Bosnia on the grounds of their race or religion. Of course, some Bosnians (usually attached to extreme Islamic militias rather than the Bosnian army) have carried out atrocities, but you cannot compare the scale of what are rare and unsanctioned acts of desperation to the state-sponsored genocide being carried out by the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA). And, obviously, part of the tac-

tics of ethnic cleansing is to provoke a similar response from your enemy.

The multi-ethnic working class of Bosnia, through their trade unions, have repeatedly asked the workers' organisations of the world to come to their aid, but have received a piss poor response. Who can blame them if now in desperation they look for aid elsewhere? They know what they are up against and what the consequences of defeat mean.

I really don't see what the problem is. Working class people are being raped, tortured and murdered because of their supposed racial inferiority. The imperialist powers are colluding in this for their own selfish reasons. You acknowledge these plain facts in your paper -- so why the cop out? If you want these people to become socialists, then get yourself on a convoy and get your arse over there and meet these people -- show some real solidarity.

If Islamic extremists are gaining support in Bosnia, then that is hardly surprising if the so-called socialists are too fucking busy bickering about petty details and political point-scoring from the safety of their university campuses or whatever.

We must be fighting now -- for the UN to get out, for the arms embargo to be lifted, and for the rights of refugees to settle in Britain. Anything less than that and you should change the title of your paper, cos it will be a lie.

I'll finish off with a sample of Bosnian Serb radio after the ethnic cleansing of Srebrenica, just for those who still believe Serb expansionism represents the last stand of 'Yugoslav socialism' (national socialism, perhaps?): 'Die, you scum, the Serbs are the champions. Come out onto your balconies and hail the white Serb race!'

James Tait, Edinburgh



'Any rational agent who wills an end necessarily wills the means to the end...' Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

The British Left's stand on the wars in the former Yugoslavia has been called a moral betrayal. Supporters of Bosnia-Herzegovina, whose views have been well-aided in the media, have accused leading figures of the Labour Left, such as Tony Benn, the Committee for Peace in the Balkans and the Socialist Workers Party, of a failure to oppose Serbian aggression. Comparisons have been made with the Spanish Civil War. At worst it is said that part of the Left is complicit in genocide. 'Multi-cultural Bosnia' is pitted against Serb 'fascism'. To take sides for Bosnia, from calls for lifting the arms-embargo, to more explicit support for Western military action, has been the cry of influential individuals and groups, such as Michael Foot and Ken Loach, the *New Statesman* and *Society* and the Bosnia Solidarity Campaign, and Workers' Aid to Bosnia.

At the end of August NATO and the UN finally intervened against the Bosnian Serbs. Some of the wilder pro-Bosnians have asserted that the West was backing the Serbs. This is now impossible to sustain. Croatia has been armed, and its military trained, with American and German compliance. They have driven out the Krajina Serbs. The West has created a Rapid Reaction Force to enforce its plans. In Bosnia, using techniques perfected during the Gulf War, aircraft have attacked Serb positions, backed up by ground-forces around Sarajevo. This is the biggest NATO military action since the Second World War.

This is now the time to reassess the claims of Bosnia's supporters. The whole moral and political case of those who proclaim solidarity with Bosnia is collapsing around their ears. In its place the views of those who have refused to take sides should be given the attention they deserve.

Firstly, how was it possible to argue that the Bosnian break-away from multi-ethnic and multinational Yugoslavia could create a multi-ethnic state? Bosnian supporters have stated that the country was unique in combining Croatian and Serbian participation, even if the land was led by a Muslim nationalist leader, President Izetbegovic. This adherence has its limits. A large section of the rural Serbs did not want to become part of this political structure, and boycotted the referendum to ratify independence. Bosnia-Herzegovina, after Croatia, was nevertheless internationally recognised as a sovereign body. Its faults soon became apparent. The conflicts that broke out, between Croatians, often organised by the far-Right HOS, the Bosnian Pale Serbs, and the Sarajevo government, and the ethnic cleansing that then took place (and continues), makes a mockery of the principles of international law. The Helsinki Charter, which forbids the use of force to alter the borders of recognised states, could not cope with frontiers whose origins were largely administrative and criss-crossed deeply-felt national differences. Above all, how could a multi-ethnic polity be established if large sections of the population simply do not want

Bosnia and the Left: the games end

to participate? By what right can they be forced to join?

Secondly, it was this conflict between different national 'rights' which has fuelled the fighting. To some on the Left there is a distinction between the justifications of one state, Bosnia, which is held to have legitimacy on a multi-ethnic basis, and others, such as the Bosnian Serbs, who want a state based on their own identity. While Bosnia has undoubtedly a preferable political basis, its multi-ethnicity stops short of one important group: these same Serbs, Serbs who do not want to be part of Bosnia, are called Chetniks, fascists, and puppets of Belgrade. This is to define the limits of pluralism in terms of whole populations. It is to impose the absolute application of the principle of national self-determination in mixed-nationality countries. Some on the Left have thus drifted to the belief that the rights of the Bosnians had an unconditional validity. Bosnia was engaged in a war of national liberation. Any means to that end could be justified.

'Now, by contrast, a mechanism has been set in motion with US involvement behind the Croat-Bosnian alliance, which is likely to exacerbate the underlying frictions. They have taken sides, partly in the hope that their own scheme for the partition of Bosnia will be accepted, more fundamentally, to crush Serbian nationalism.'

Others called for negotiations to re-establish arrangements which permit a peaceful resolution of differences and multi-national federations. Initially there was an attempt by the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly to try this. However, that some way out of the war was possible by co-operation between peace movements was always highly unlikely. Alan Clarke, with Tory cynicism (and unfortunate correctness), remarked while debating with Mary Kaldor that the 'nice people' were not holding the arms.

Thirdly, in a vacuum, support for Bosnia has gradually grown. In real terms this has meant that the Western powers would have to be involved. Islamic countries, despite finance and armaments, have little weight. Robin Blackburn observed in 1993 that, 'The Bosnian declaration of independence was predicated on the view that intervention by the 'international community' -- that is the governments of the Western powers -- was both desirable and likely.' (*New Left Review* No 199). The Bosnian Solidarity Campaign has called for an end to the arms blockade (although this is infinitely permeable -- witness Croatia, also under the same ban). The real issue was whether the USA would, by lifting the embargo, be able to offer credits. This was well understood by the right wing Republican

majority in Congress whose interest in selling weapons is well-established. The American involvement in the formation of the Croatian and Bosnian alliance has enabled them to swing NATO behind the military action Sarajevo desires without this option.

Willing the ends of the Bosnian government signifies adopting these means. Leftist supporters may wish for a less imperfect instrument than NATO, but it is hard to see what else they refer to when they back the Bosnians' call for what they need. Unfortunately Pax Americana in the region is related to other needs: from the stability of Turkey, a settlement of the Macedonian problem (where the US is established), and, above all, the creation of a stable zone of cheap labour in a free-market. The expansion of German investment eastwards is also threatened by Serbian nationalism, and few have to be reminded of the historical antagonism at work in this regard. It is unlikely, to say the least, that the economic solutions such a peace would bring in its train would dampen ethnic conflict: the collapse of Yugoslavia was itself brought about by economic crisis and penury, which will not be solved by American plans.

Bosnia's supporters did the Left a great disservice in suggesting that there was a simple issue at stake in the wars in the ex-Yugoslavia. Some of the reality of the conflict was outlined by Jonathan Steele (*Red Pepper*, September 1995), who suggested that the UN's efforts at negotiation were not totally in vain. Initially, the so-called 'pro-Serbian' bias of UNPROFOR attempted to relate to these intricacies by refusing to deny the Serbs' claims. Now, by contrast, a mechanism has been set in motion with US involvement behind the Croat-Bosnian alliance, which is likely to exacerbate the underlying frictions. They have taken sides, partly in the hope that their own scheme for the partition of Bosnia will be accepted, more fundamentally, to crush Serbian nationalism. That some on the Left reacted to Serbian terror by taking the Bosnian side is wholly understandable -- though their tendency to consider the plight of Serbian refugees and war victims as the fault of the Serbian leaders rather than the equally intractable Croats and Bosnians is less so. Some groups in the pro-Bosnian camp are motivated by a deeply misguided hatred of what they claim is Serbian 'fascism' (and 'stalinism'; a few have simply considered the cause a convenient means to attack rivals on the Left. Their time has, nonetheless, passed. A multinational resolution of differences cannot be imposed by fire-power. If NATO involvement continues we will see no solution other than that of the battle-field and air strikes, with all the 'collateral damage' we know they are capable of bringing.

In these conditions any attempt to revive a dialogue between the remaining anti-militarist and anti-nationalist populations in the Balkans is improbable. Only when NATO has been extricated from the region can any long-term solution be found. In the process, small though its contribution may be, the British Left must rid itself of any illusions about the Bosnian state, refuse to take sides, and campaign against external intervention.

Andrew Coates

Turkey in political chaos

'We got the government down, the IMF is next!'

As the coalition between the Republican People's Party (RPP - a social democratic party) and the True Path Party (TP - a conservative-liberal party) broke down, more than 300,000 public sector workers went on strike with more unions joining the strike every day. During the same week, police attacked political prisoners in Buca Prison, murdering at least three according to official reports, up to eight claimed the prisoners. These events take place in the midst of the economic crisis into which Turkey plunged last year. ELIF MUTLUAY gives the background to the current crisis and analyses the working class response.

At the beginning of 1994, the Turkish economy went into a deep recession, precipitated by the lowering of Turkey's credit rating by the international rating institution, Standard and Poor. Last year, at least one million workers were laid off and inflation hit 150 per cent, while wage increases were generally around 50-60 per cent. The Turkish state's war against the Kurdish struggle was as fierce as ever, with Turkey becoming the biggest importer of heavy weapons in the world.

The RPP-TP coalition came into power in 1991 promising to make up the 50 per cent erosion of real wages over the previous ten years and to introduce democratic reforms. The economy is in a shambles and the government has introduced even more anti-democratic laws by claiming that their first priority was ending 'terrorism'. Besides the notorious 'deaths in custody' and widespread torture, many journalists, intellectuals and trade unionists remain in prison for statements that are not to the liking of the government. In March, riots broke out in the slums of Istanbul mainly populated by poor Alewis, leaving 33 dead (see FRFI 124).

Working class reaction to the 1994 austerity measures has been, until now, rather weak. Many attempts were made particularly to resist the widespread lay-offs but they were sporadic and isolated. The left was unable to co-ordinate and organise the movement and the trade unions were unwilling to do so. The trade union leadership advised their members to keep cool, to be patient and place 'national interests' first, collaborating with the capitalists in order to save their jobs. This is not surprising. The incomes and lifestyles of the trade union leadership correspond to middle bourgeois levels. The leaders of the Tes-is trade union, for example, earn around £3,140 monthly, in a country where the minimum wage is around £100 a month.

Another important factor in blunting the working class response is the fear of unemployment in a country where the laws offer almost no job security, and the jobless are estimated to be around 20 per cent. Also the level of the state brutality, comparable to Pinochet's Chile, has frightened off many workers.

To get an overall view of the situation in Turkey it is necessary to say something about the state of the revolutionary movement in Turkey and Kurdistan. The Turkish left remains highly divided and factional competition dominates the agenda of many organisations. The impact of this was pointed to in the

analysis of the March riots in the article in FRFI 124.

The main reason behind this factional competition is that divisions in the revolutionary movements do not correlate to class divisions. The debates that once divided the left over issues such as whether to take the Albanian or Chinese path have lost all significance with the collapse of the Soviet Union



Workers demonstrate in the Alewi district of Istanbul

and the other socialist countries, and the slow restoration of capitalism in China. It became obvious that these countries showed very similar characteristics and faced similar problems. With less sustainable arguments to rationalise the divisions the leadership of most organisations went into 'self-protection' mode. Bigger banners, bigger marches, more visible, courageous acts and so on became the focus of inter-factional rivalry.

This 'self-protection' has had a very negative impact on both the revolutionary movement and the working class struggle. But there are signs that the class struggle is beginning to exert some pressure. A few organisations have merged, and a legal party has been formed from six different factions. Already, a rough division has emerged between revolutionary and reformist groups. The revolutionary movement also will be under pressure to realign, corresponding more closely to class divisions.

Another important division cutting across working class ranks is the division between the Turkish and Kurdish movements. This division is very destructive for two reasons. The first is that the struggle of the working class and the Kurdish people are both against the same state and system. The biggest fear of the Turkish state is to have to wage a war simultaneously on both fronts, and it has managed to avoid this by actively promoting Turkish chauvinism. A joint struggle is an immense opportunity.

The second reason is that, as a result of the decade long immigration because of state brutality and the war, probably more Kurds live in the big metropolitan cities in Turkey than in the traditional Kurdish lands in the south east. The new immigrants mainly work in the so-called informal sector and form a very large portion of the 'reserve army of the unemployed' used very effectively by the ruling class as a threat. Internationalism is not just a nice ideal but a necessity.

In the face of a divided and incompetent left, and reluctant trade union leadership, working class action that has taken place gives a mixed picture. On 5 August, a demonstration took place in Ankara to protest against the meagre wage increase offered by the government. Even though the trade unions that called the demonstration were not too eager to promote it, around 200,000 public sector workers turned up. The turn out was very significant - a third of all public sector workers. However, the trade unions were able to ideologically dominate the rally, advising moderation and distributing Turkish flags.

The strikes that have begun in the public sector show that the proposed 5.4 per cent wage increase in a country with 150 per cent inflation is intolerable no matter how 'moderate' one is. It is obvious that the current trade union leadership can block the movement only to a point, but unless the revolutionary organisations face up to the task the current discontent is likely to just blow up violently and be suppressed by the state. Already, the President has proposed enacting emergency provisions to postpone the strikes.

The resignation of Prime Minister Ciller occurred when the newly elected president of the RPP, Baykal, announced that his party was withdrawing from the coalition. Baykal, the fourth RPP president in four years, has been trying to win the post for the past 20 years. He succeeded finally in his fourth attempt. An ambitious and cunning politician, Baykal withdrew from the coalition hoping to prove that he was different from the last three presidents, and, sensing the inevitable growth of opposition and discontent, wanted his party to be out of government.

As this article was written it was not yet clear how a new government would be formed. The two main possibilities are a grand coalition of the two centre-right parties, or a minority government supported by a patchy coalition of ultra-nationalists and small parties. Either way, Turkey will have an election in less than a year facing a severe economic crisis with internal debt repayments of \$37.9 billion alone over the next seven months and with no party able to claim more than 20 per cent of the total vote.

The workers on strike have embraced the slogan: 'We got the government down, the IMF is next!'. The slogan summarises the agenda of the next year in Turkey: a showdown between the working class forces and the ruling class. ■



Mururoa:

No more nuclear tests

FRANCIS SQUIRE

On 5 September, just as French President Jacques Chirac had promised, a nuclear bomb, a third more powerful than the one that devastated Hiroshima 50 years ago, exploded in the lagoon of Mururoa atoll in so-called 'French Polynesia'.

The people of the region had been using peaceful protests to demand a referendum on the tests since the newly-elected Chirac made his ominous announcement on 13 June. Immediately after the bomb went off, thousands took to the streets of Papeete, Tahiti and destroyed millions of dollars worth of French property. The international airport was burned to the ground. Demonstrators bravely fought French riot police for hours, until they were finally forced to scatter by barrages of rubber bullets and teargas. Extra Foreign Legionnaires and military reinforcements have been sent to Tahiti to prepare for further confrontations. Oscar Temaru, leader of the main Polynesian liberation movement, said: 'We want the world to know that Chirac's decision is a colonial decision.'

France sought possession of Tahiti and surrounding islands in the early 19th century as a base for trade in the Pacific region, and as a penal colony. Under the leadership of Queen Pomare, Polynesians resisted until they were forced to submit to French bombardment in 1842. Most Polynesians continued to live off the land and by fishing until 'French Polynesia' became the centre for French nuclear bomb tests in 1966. Thousands of people were forced to leave their homes on small islands and atolls, and move to Tahiti. Since then, 'French Polynesia' has been run by an artificial economy whose only purpose is to serve the French nuclear war machine.

In 1992, President Mitterrand announced a moratorium on nuclear tests. This resulted in a growth in the independence movement, as people looked forward to a future without France or nuclear bombs, and towards the development of their own culture and resources.

The French government claims that no harm has been done to the people of the region, but it has never investigated the matter. An independent survey found that cancer rates in

'French Polynesia' were 20 per cent higher than in France, and 50 per cent higher than in Japan. The French also deny any harm has been done to the environment, but have refused to allow any independent research. Repeated explosions have caused much of Mururoa to sink below sea level, and scientists say that it is in danger of disappearing altogether, contaminating the sea for thousands of years.

Nowadays, nuclear bomb tests can be simulated exactly on computers. France says it doesn't have this technology; the US has offered it to them, but they've refused. Why? Why are they developing weapons of genocide when no one is threatening them? And why has the British government failed to condemn the tests (even the US has said they are 'regrettable'), and assisted them with funds and information?

The answer seems to lie with plans to create a powerful European bloc that can develop and then preserve itself by threatening anyone that gets in its way with annihilation. French Prime Minister Alain Juppé said, 'The future European defence will not be built without the French deterrent.'

Thierry de Montbrial, director of the French Institute for International Relations, explained France's intentions in *Time* magazine. 'France,' he wrote, 'is steadfastly committed to the process of European integration, which can be completed only when the European Union endows itself with an autonomous defence organisation... French and British nuclear forces will form the bedrock of European defence... This vision is shared by a significant and growing portion of the German political establishment'.

That must explain why, despite the powerful German environmental lobby, the German government has not officially condemned France. The words of Juppé and de Montbrial expose the imperialist ambitions behind the bomb tests and the threat they pose to oppressed nations of the world. ■

As we go to press France has detonated a second, much larger bomb.

UN Women's Conference

'Women hold up half the sky'

JANE BENNETT

In September, Beijing, China was the venue for the Fourth UN World Conference on Women. There were 40,000 delegates, the vast majority women, from 180 countries - most of them gathering for the informal conference of NGOs sited in Huairou, 52 km north of Beijing. The smaller, formal, UN Conference was centred in Beijing itself. The Conference decisions, as with many jamborees organised by the UN, have no binding effect on governments; it relies for its effect on the publicity and energy generated. This is where the Beijing conference went wrong.

The Beijing conference was likely to be just as controversial as the three previous meetings but the issue which dominated the news was China's 'failure' to host the conference to the satisfaction of Western journalists. Hillary Clinton received worldwide coverage for her attack on

China, and even this was accompanied by spurious attacks on the organisers who had moved the venue indoors at short notice because of rain (at the request of the US delegation), with the consequent exclusion of many of the audience.

There were far more important issues to be reported. The UN's *Sixth Annual Development Report*, published in August, documents the conditions women face in 130 countries. In none of these countries do women receive the same education, income and health opportunities as men. Two thirds of the world's illiterate people are women. Everywhere women's health is threatened by prostitution, rape and domestic violence. The clearest and most dramatic result of austerity programmes, forced by the IMF and World Bank to pay debts, is that social programmes to aid women and children are cut. Women's nutrition and child welfare suffers as a direct result.

The restoration of the 'free

market' in the former socialist countries has affected women dramatically - women are the first to lose their jobs as industries close down. In China itself, undergoing economic 'liberalisation', 70% of the jobs lost in state industries have been women's. In a country where socialism meant an unprecedented measure of equality, Chinese women are now under pressure to stay at home and wife beating is on the rise.

As Indian economist Gita Sen explained, the burden of poverty is carried, in the main, by women, and it is around this issue that women internationally can organise on common issues: 'The elite women of New Delhi consume, pollute and exploit just as voraciously as the high-living rich of the West and conversely, the New York City ghetto resident suffers just as much discrimination, poverty and insecurity as the Bombay slum dweller.' Issues like this deserved the publicity, and didn't get it. ■



CUBA VIVE!

Che Guevara a fire to light up the future

Che Guevara was an outstanding historical figure in the socialist movement and the Cuban revolution. In the Sixties he was a household name, even in imperialist Europe and America. His life and writings inspired thousands to take up the cause of human emancipation, to fight to eliminate human suffering. Che was an idealist in the most noble sense of the word. He believed in the possibility of a decent society fit for all humans to live in. And he sacrificed his life at the early age of 39 fighting against capitalism and imperialism to build such a society. EDDIE ABRAHAMS examines his legacy.



who do this consider themselves guardians of freedom?' (p334)

Self-sacrificing idealism

To fight this system, Che Guevara gave up the certainty of a privileged life in Argentina where he was born in 1928. On completing medical studies he toured Latin America on a motorcycle. He saw the most appalling poverty, suffering and disease – affecting millions. He recoiled against this immorality and injustice, refusing to accept that such a state was a natural and unchangeable purgatory for humanity. He began studying Marxism.

In Guatemala he met up with Cuban revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro. Despite being a severe asthmatic he joined the famous Granma expedition in 1958 and became one of the outstanding guerrilla leaders of the Cuban Revolution. In socialist Cuba he served as President of the National Bank and as Minister of Industry. Besides his official duties he wrote a great deal on economics, on art and culture, on guerrilla warfare, on everything that concerned the struggle for human emancipation. Many of his writings contained polemics against the deformations of socialism in the USSR and the socialist bloc.

After the sacrifices and dangers of Cuba's revolutionary war, Che had a second chance to settle down to a comfortable existence. But in 1965 he resigned all his posts and left Cuba to open up a new guerrilla front in Bolivia. There he was captured and murdered by the Bolivian army in 1967.

Internationalism

Che had no time for petty nationalism, for localism and provincialism. For him the working class man or woman was a citizen of the world. Imperialism 'is a world system... and it must be beaten in a great worldwide confrontation.' So:

'Let the flag under which we fight be the sacred cause of the liberation of humanity, so that to die under the colours of Vietnam, Venezuela, Guatemala, Laos, Guinea, Colombia, Brazil... will be equally glorious and desirable for a Latin American, an Asian, an African, and even European.' (p358)

Armchair solidarity and internationalism was alien to him: 'The solidarity of the progressive world with the Vietnamese people has something of the bitter irony of the plebeians cheering on the gladiators in the Roman Circus. To wish the victim success is not enough; one must

share his fate. One must join him in death or in victory.' (p349-50)

Che put his principles to practice, joining the struggle in Congo, travelling throughout the world to render direct help to anti-imperialist movements, and then giving his life in Bolivia.

Guevara's socialism

The socialism Che Guevara fought for was not just a narrow 'economic question':

'A socialist economy without communist moral values does not interest me. We fight poverty, but we also fight alienation... If communism neglects facts of consciousness, it can serve as a method of distribution but it will no longer express revolutionary moral values...' (quoted by Carlos Tablada, p215)**

Against private production for private profit, Che argued that '...centralised planning is the mode of existence of socialist society, its defining characteristic and the point at which man's consciousness finally succeeds in synthesising and directing the economy towards its goal: the full liberation of the human being in the context of communist society.' (p220)

But socialist centralised planning has nothing in common with a command economy whose strategy is controlled by people unaccountable to the working class. The socialist economy requires democracy and mass participation: 'Building socialism is based on the work of the masses, on the capacity of the masses to be able to organise themselves to better guide industry, agriculture and the country's economy.' (Tablada p185)

Socialism, however, is not just about the transformation of economic production, it is about the transformation of human consciousness. 'We cannot arrive at communism through simple mechanical accumulation of quantities of goods... We will not do an adequate job if we become simply producers of goods... without at the same time becoming producers of men.' (Tablada p171)

Capitalism creates alienated and selfish human beings. Socialism aims to 'liberate them from this alienation'. Instead of the isolated struggle to satisfy 'their own personal ambitions' socialism 'generates a consciousness of the need for their incorporation into society, and... of their importance as the motor of that society'. In socialist society, people become a 'conscious collection of individuals fighting for the same cause.' The aim is a new society in which 'man truly reaches his full human condition' because he 'produces without being compelled by physical necessity to sell himself as a commodity.'

This is the vision that fired Che Guevara. Let those who say that this vision is irrelevant, that socialism and humanism are things of the past, continue to fester in their intellectual gutters. Che's legacy is not for them. It is for those who have nothing, who are alienated from an anti-democratic political system, who have no future in a society where the goal posts are set by the rich and greedy. ■

* All references unless otherwise stated are from *Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution – writings and speeches of Ernesto Che Guevara*, Pathfinder Press, 1987

** *Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism*, Carlos Tablada, Pathfinder Press, 1989

Guevara's idealism is today dismissed with sneers by post-modern intellectuals paid to teach that ideas of social equality and justice, of a classless society, of an end to exploitation are remnants of discredited Enlightenment pretensions. Against such moral decay Guevara's intellectual legacy speaks as powerfully to the present as it did to his own times. Not because he was a superman but because the forces he so passionately denounced still dominate the world.

Imperialism and capitalism

In a 1965 message, entitled 'Create two, three... many Vietnams, that is the watchword', Che Guevara said:

'21 years without a world war in these days of maximum confrontations, of violent clashes and abrupt turns, appears to be a very high number. All of us declare our readiness to fight for this peace. But without analysing its practical results (poverty, degradation, constantly increasing exploitation of enormous sectors of humanity), it is appropriate to ask whether this peace is real.' (p347)*

Is such an approach not relevant, given the claims made this year on the 50th anniversary of VE Day? Genocide in Rwanda, vicious wars in the Balkans, fought at the behest of the great powers, the rise of fascism in Europe and fundamentalism in the Middle East. And across the world a terrifying growth of poverty, paralleled by a devastating degradation of the environment, afflicting not just the Third World, but even the most developed capitalist countries.

What are the forces that produce such a society? How can poverty, hunger and disease for the majority coexist with fabulous wealth for the minority? Che provides a convincing answer:

'Today there are kings without crowns; they are the monopolies, the true masters of entire nations and at times of entire continents... The importance of monopolies is immense, so great that it makes political power disappear in many of our republics.' (p87-88)

At the service of these multinational corporations are international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, GATT and others. All these:

'are examples of organisations placed at the service of the great capitalist colonialist powers [which] inject themselves into domestic economic policy, foreign trade policy, and all kinds of internal financial relations as well as financial relations among different nations... All these organisations are governed by principles that are represented as safeguards of fairness and reciprocity in international economic relations. In reality, however, they are merely fetishes behind which hide the most subtle instruments for the perpetuation of backwardness and exploitation.' (p306)

Nearly three decades after Che's death, the same forces continue to ravage the world and its people. The IMF and World Bank dictate poverty and hunger-creating austerity programmes to Third World nations at the behest of the multinationals, 15 of whom control the market of 20 of the world's key commodities.

These multinationals are driven by one consideration – profit. Human

life means nothing if it doesn't make a profit. Today, even the most 'compassionate' economists – Will Hutton, for example – shy away from asking where profit originates. Che Guevara doesn't. In a capitalist economy, where the means of production are owned and controlled privately, by a minority, profit for the few is produced because 'men and women have to sell themselves as commodities on the capitalist market.' This 'entails surrendering part of (their) being in the form of labour power sold, which no longer belongs to (them)... As a result, the human being is dehumanised and becomes 'an alienated specimen' forced to 'travel completely alone over lost roads towards distant aspirations.'

'In capitalist society man is controlled by a pitiless law usually beyond his comprehension. The alienated human specimen is tied to society as a whole by an invisible umbilical cord: the law of value. This law acts upon all aspects of his life, shaping his course and destiny.' (p249)

Capitalist propagandists suggest the

possibility of an infinite horizon of success in society by giving examples such as Rockefeller. But 'the amount of poverty and suffering required for a Rockefeller to emerge, and the amount of depravity entailed in the accumulation of a fortune of such magnitude, are left out of the picture...' (p249)

Che Guevara never fails to bring them into the picture. His passionate denunciations of exploitation and poverty are rousing calls to battle for justice against a system that secures wealth only by means of violence and barbarity.

A firm defender of the oppressed whether in the Third World or in the imperialist heartlands, Guevara denounced US imperialism when it claimed to intervene in defence of freedom and democracy:

'Those who kill their own children and discriminate daily against them because of their colour; those who let the murderers of Blacks remain free, protecting them, and furthermore punishing the black population because they demand their legitimate rights as free men – how can those



CUBA VIVE!

US blockade

Target: Cuba

The Cuban Revolution triumphed at the beginning of 1959. The revolutionaries faced a largely rural population with an average annual income per person of \$91.25 – an eighth of that of the poorest state in the USA, Mississippi. Only 11% of Cubans drank milk, 4% ate meat, 2-3% had running water, and 9.1% had electricity. Meanwhile, 36% had intestinal parasites, 14% had tuberculosis, and 43% were illiterate. A third of the workforce were totally or semi-unemployed. Cuba was a case for radical change if ever there was one.

On 2 January 1959, the government announced that 50-60% of casino profits would be directed to welfare programmes. The first of a series of land reforms was enacted on 17 May. Large estates were expropriated and turned into state farms. The US United Fruit Company was dispossessed without compensation. Land was turned over to small farmers, sugar cane farms were made into co-operatives. In June, counterrevolutionaries flew from Florida to attack Cuban sugar mills and cane fields. Air incursions and bombing raids continued. When the USA objected to a proposed deal in which Cuba would buy British jets, the British government called the deal off.

With US-owned farm and mineral properties confiscated, the Cuban government offered to discuss com-

pensation. The US Secretary of State declined any such offer. During 1959 the CIA began monitoring the telephone conversations of the Cuban leaders. Lockheed U2 spy planes overflew the island. Subversive radio stations transmitted to Cuba from Miami, the Bahamas and Central America. One such station was directed by a former head of United Fruit, who was also an intelligence officer who previously had helped overthrow the reformist Arbenz government in Guatemala. At the end of 1959, the CIA began to land saboteurs in Cuba. The US multinational Texaco's oil refinery was confiscated in June 1960, quickly followed by two other foreign-owned refineries. On 6 July the US sugar quota from Cuba was cut off. Castro retaliated, nationalising US-owned sugar mills. In July, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the president authorise a full invasion.

As the invasion force approached on 16 April 1961, Fidel Castro announced the socialist character of the revolution. On 17 April a force of 1,500 Cuban counter-revolutionaries landed at 2am on the Bay of Pigs. Castro personally directed the counter-attack, using Soviet-supplied weapons, while the workers and peasants of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution rounded up thousands of counter-revolutionary sympathisers

in the cities. The invasion force was destroyed in less than 72 hours. US imperialism was humiliated. The gains of the national democratic revolution had been preserved only by taking it forward to the socialist revolution. Later that year, Castro explained: 'The anti-imperialist, socialist revolution could only be one single revolution, because there is only one revolution. That is the great dialectic truth of humanity: imperialism and, standing against it, socialism.' He thumped the table in front of him and shouted, 'I am a Marxist-Leninist and I shall be a Marxist-Leninist until the last days of my life.'

The US imperialists have used every means at their disposal short of all-out war to strangle the revolution: economic sabotage, bacteriological warfare, the economic blockade (which has cost Cuba an estimated \$40bn) and repeated attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro. In the face of this relentless pressure, still the Cuban people resist to defend the dignity of life socialism has achieved.

Trevor Rayne



Protesting against 'Independent' lies

On 18 August, supporters of FRFI's Rock around the Blockade campaign responded to the latest offensive in the so-called *Independent's* campaign against Cuba with a noisy picket of the newspaper's offices on Canary Wharf.

This new offering by US-based journalist Phil Davison (see FRFI 126 for earlier articles) on 12 August, attacked the Cuban health service for its pioneering work on Parkinson's disease, involving the transplant of foetal matter – both, it would appear, for charging rich foreign patients from the industrialised nations for such treatment and because of Davison's own opposition to abortion. For most of us, of course, that abortion is freely available on demand in Cuba is just another example of Cuba's superiority to Britain. But Davison focuses instead on Dr Molina, until recently involved in performing such operations, but now a born-again Catholic allying herself with the Pope, Mother Teresa and John Major in her campaign to discredit Cuba. *The Independent* consistently refuses to print letters objecting to its one-sided coverage of Cuba.

Our picket lasted nearly two hours, with loud chants over the megaphone – 'Davison, Independent, CIA – how many lies have you told today?' and graphic placards. A journalist was sent down to talk to us and agreed to deliver our letter. Next day, we received this reply from Deputy Editor Martin Jacques: '...We would certainly wish to stand by the story which Phil Davidson [sic] wrote and we carried on 13 August [sic]. As to your general point, we try and give a fair assessment of developments in Cuba and most certainly recognise that, given the American blockade, the Cubans have faced a very difficult task for a long time now.'

This is, of course, that same Martin Jacques who once edited *Marxism Today*, ill-fated magazine of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

'There will be no transition towards capitalism'

On 5 September, Cuba's National Assembly passed new laws to stimulate capitalist investment in Cuba and bring in much-needed hard currency. For the first time, foreign companies will be able to have full ownership, instead of a 50 per cent partnership with the state, in all sectors other than health, education and defence. The right to repatriate profits is guaranteed.

It is clear that these measures represent a further opening up of the Cuban economy to the capitalist world market. However, as Castro emphasised, Cuba will hold on to the major share of company property. Unlike other countries in Latin America, in Cuba there will be no large-scale privatisation of industry and basic services, nor excessive tax exemptions and subsidies to foreign investors. There will be no fundamental change to Cuba's socialist system of production. For, as Castro made clear, these measures are not prompted by neoliberal policies or a desire to move towards capitalism, but are a necessary response to defend the gains of the revolution in

the face of an unrelenting US blockade: 'We have to do it, there's no alternative... We have gone down this road basically because it was the only alternative for saving the Revolution and saving the conquests of socialism.'

British capital, meanwhile, is continuing to take advantage of the absence of US competition created by the blockade, with companies such as oil firms British Borneo and Premier Consolidated, tobacco company BAT and Unilever amongst those moving into Cuba. Small wonder, then, that Britain opposes the tightening of the blockade to extend to third countries such as Britain, while consistently refusing to oppose the blockade itself at the United Nations.

What is certain is that such companies are no friends of Cuba; their motivation is solely the profits they can amass. They cannot be allies of those seeking to build a movement in solidarity with the Cuban people and the gains of the Cuban revolution, but only of those within the country who wish to see Cuba go down the

capitalist road. In the words of the *Economist* (9 September 1995), 'Mr Castro... increasingly has to play a delicate balancing act between a young reformist faction in the ruling party and a dwindling old guard... who remain convinced that free-market ideas are incompatible with the socialist state they built.'

Fortunately, those committed to the defence of the Cuban working class are neither as old nor as dwindling as the *Economist* might hope. The Union of Young Communists (UJC), which organised this summer's 10,000 strong international *Cuba vive!* (Cuba lives!) youth festival in Havana, are a leading force in defending both the gains and the ideals of the revolution. It was the youth who greeted with rousing applause Castro's closing speech at the festival when he stated: 'Some people say, "You have to adopt transitional measures". We already made the transition 36 years ago... A transition towards what? Towards capitalism? No, there will be no transition towards capitalism.'

Cat Wiener



The Revolution brought tremendous gains for the Cuban working class: today, in terms of life expectancy, infant mortality and overall health of the population, Cuba ranks alongside the most developed countries of the world. Enrolment in primary education is 100 per cent, and almost all children are immunised against diseases such as TB, polio and measles which kill and cripple millions of children across Latin America each year. The United Nations recently placed Cuba 16th in the world, out of 116 countries, in terms of women's representation in political and economic life.

Oppose the US blockade – express yourself

American Express is a US company that participates directly in the commercial and economic blockade of Cuba. Use their FREEPOST American Express Card application forms to write in and express your views of their disgraceful support for a blockade that is crippling the Cuban revolution. Remember, they pay the postage on every form received.

Subscribe to Granma International

Direct every week from Havana for only £30 a year, Granma International brings you regular information from the heart of the Cuban revolution while your money provides much-needed hard currency for the Cuban economy.

To: CSC (Granma), 928 Bourges Boulevard, Peterborough PE1 2AN.

I wish to take out an annual subscription to Granma International and enclose a cheque for £30 payable to BCRC Granma.

Name

Address

HANDS OFF CUBA!

DEMONSTRATE SATURDAY 14 OCTOBER 12 NOON

MARBLE ARCH TO TRAFALGAR SQUARE

Join Rock around the Blockade's contingent on the CSC 'Hands off Cuba!' march Saturday 14 October.

Rock around the Blockade supporters will be marching with a band from the London School of Samba not only to oppose the illegal US blockade, but to display our unstinting support for the achievements of the Cuban Revolution and socialism itself with placards, banners, slogans and flags. Bring your own banners, bring friends and comrades and join us to demand: 'Imperialist hands off Cuba! Long live the Cuban Revolution! Long live socialism!'

Meet Marble Arch 12 noon to march to Trafalgar Square via the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square.

Kenia Serrano speaks

Kenia Serrano Puig is Secretary of International Relations for the Federation of University Students (FEU) in Cuba and an active member of the Union of Young Communists. In Britain at the invitation of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, she spoke to supporters of Rock around the Blockade and other students at Manchester Metropolitan University.

'I'm here to talk about the reality of the Cuban situation, in the face of an economic blockade which causes many problems and has existed since the beginning of the revolution. Then, it was because we'd nationalised US assets. Later, they used the excuse of the Cold War. Since the collapse of the socialist countries, they have no such excuse – yet the blockade is getting tighter. The real reason is not economic, it's political.'

On the social effects of the crisis, and the growth in prostitution

'At the time of the revolution, life expectancy in Cuba was 59; in 1993 it was 75. Cuba is among 21 countries in the world with the lowest infant mortality – less than 10 per 1,000 live births. Cuba is an underdeveloped country – yet in the other underdeveloped countries of Latin America, how many children die each year, how many don't go to school? We haven't lost a lot of these gains of socialism. We are facing this economic crisis because we want to maintain these social gains. It's true people feel its effects more closely than five years ago because of the relations we used to have with the socialist countries. But as to prostitution – I don't think there is a lot of prostitution. Some, mainly young, people are involved – but unlike, say, Jamaica or Haiti, it's not to buy food or medicines or for their family needs, but to buy clothes, for example. We must solve this problem.'

'For example, I am studying to be a teacher: the main thing is to teach young people what is important in life are your principles, not to prostitute yourself for more commodities.'

'We face a hard crisis. The places for young people to go and enjoy themselves are not the same. We are making a big effort to open more discos for the young people to go to, swimming pools, things like that... That's why this project [Rock around the Blockade] matters – because providing entertainment to the Cuban youth is very important. It's going to be very welcome, not just in Ciego, but everywhere in Cuba, because when you hear somebody is coming with such a solidarity proposal, it is very welcome.'

On solidarity

'We are very happy to see the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, with so many organisations involved in it. Last year, the Container [material aid campaign for Cuba] gave educational and medical help of many things we were short of in Cuba. Many students, workers, trade unionists are going to Cuba, organising brigades, to see how Cubans are coping and thinking for themselves. That's important to us because we feel we are not isolated. People from all over the world are going to Cuba.'

'I hope to establish concrete ties with students' organisations here – academic, research, any kind of projects you're interested in.'

On the role of the youth

'The decisions taken about the new economic situation weren't just made by old state officials – young people (51.3% of the population) are participating in how to solve the problems.'

'We have eight FEU representatives on the National Assembly. In addition, when parliament is going to analyse economic measures, they call a meeting at the economics department at the University of Havana. All students, not just our representatives, can come and say, I think it would be a good idea to do this or that.'

'Commissions of parliament can come to your factory or your university or your community and everyone can come and say what they think. This is a process that involves everybody.'

On support for Cuban socialism

'A lot of people outside Cuba may not like socialism, but oppose the injustice of the blockade. Our socialism is a very Cuban process. Such people should analyse more and see that if the Cubans have been able to resist so strongly, it is because of our commitment to defend the social project of the revolution – the fact that the workers, the young people, the farmers, continue to be the leaders of the country – it has to do with socialism. People are a little afraid talking about communism or socialism, but if they go to Cuba and read about the Cuban reality, they may change their minds!'

Kenia will be the main speaker at the 14 October demonstration. She will also be addressing a South London CSC meeting on Wednesday 11 October, 7.30pm, the Old White Horse pub, Brixton Road, London SW2 and a North East London CSC/SOAS Student Union meeting on Thursday 12 October at 1pm, Rm G57, ground floor at SOAS, Malet Street, London WC1.



Jubilant Rock around the Blockade cyclists raised more than £700 in their 60-mile ride from London to Brighton. Pictured here are: Greg, Chris, Francis, Ken, Dave, Hannah, Susie, Manolo, Sarah, Chodd, Cat, Peter and Murad at Brighton's West Pier.

Rock around the Blockade

Our magnificent sponsored bike ride from London to Brighton on 23 September has raised in excess of £700. This brings our funds up to £3,100 – well within sight of our target of £4,000 which will help not only to buy a sound system for Cuban youth, but to enable young people in this country – many of them students, unemployed or very low-waged – to participate in our brigade to Cuba in December. So if you have not yet made a donation, please fill in the form below, or buy a fundraising t-shirt or simply get involved in the campaign and help us raise money!

Over the summer we held stalls at the Reading and Edinburgh festivals and at Freshers Fayres around the country as well as numerous other political and fundraising events, enabling us to talk to many young people about our brigade and the 14 October march.

We have a busy programme in the coming months to maintain the momentum – get involved!

LONDON

10 October – International Day of Solidarity with

Cuba. We will hand in to Downing Street petitions against the US blockade, demanding the British government condemn the blockade at the United Nations. Tel: 0171 837 1688 for further details.

Friday 13 October – R&B band The Kissing Pigs play a Night for Cuba at the Enterprise Pub, Haverstock Hill, London NW3 (opposite Chalk Farm tube) 8pm onwards. Entrance £3/£2.

Saturday 14 October – Join the Rock around the Blockade contingent on the Cuba Solidarity Campaign 'Hands off Cuba!' demonstration. Meet Marble Arch, 12 noon.

Sunday 15 October – PLANNING MEETING – all those intending to come on the brigade must attend this meeting; all participants in the campaign are welcome. 11am-3pm Club Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1N (nearest tube: Holborn).

Wednesday 18 October – Cuba vive! Public meeting with video and discussion at the Turkish Education Group, 2 Newington Green Road, London N1. 7.30pm. (Provisional venue – phone for confirmation).

For details of events planned in November, contact the campaign.

Six months of CSC activity in Birmingham

In April, the RCG went along to the first meeting of Birmingham Cuba Solidarity Campaign. From the beginning, we argued for a local leaflet, public activity and support for CSC campaigns such as the Container Appeal and national demonstration.

For six months, the group refused to produce a leaflet. When no one else would organise any activity, the RCG organised events with CSC members, open to all those who supported Cuba. Martin Hoare, CSC national executive member, attacked these events, demanding that the RCG be excluded and no activity take place. He also attacked the successful Container Appeal (welcomed by the Cubans, as recent articles in *Granma* and *Cuba Si* testify) and argued that we not support the 14 October demonstration, which had been voted for at the AGM.

This sabotage was supported by the Communist Party of Britain and by the group's officials.

When we questioned this behaviour, secretary Deby Morgan wrote immediately to the national executive supporting Martin. Compare this to the refusal of the group's chair, Alan Brookfield, to write in support of the Container Appeal despite being asked to do so by three monthly meetings. In the wake of the group's embarrassment over its refusal to organise the Birmingham container of aid – which was in the event organised solely by the RCG and its allies – we warned them not to repeat this performance over the national demonstration. They have done exactly that!

The group refused to do anything until three weeks before the demonstration,

despite the issue being raised by the RCG.

At the request of our local CSC meeting, I booked a coach because Andy Chaffer (CPB) reneged on an offer to do so. I then phoned Andy and Jacqueline Contre eight weeks before the demonstration to organise trade union sponsorship.

Despite having sanitised their campaign of any reference to socialism to placate trade unions; despite ostensible support from UNISON and with the CSC's trade union officer, Martin Hoare, in our group, no approach was made to any trade union or other organisation.

The group minutes were altered to suggest no coach should have been booked. I was phoned by Alan to cancel the coach and return all CSC material – which we were using at the time to run very popular stalls publicising transport to the demonstration.

The local CSC officials have now achieved their aim: Britain's second biggest city will now send a minibus or a few cars to the national demonstration instead of a coach. Group officials Jacqueline and Deby will be travelling in private cars to attend an executive training day – presumably on sectarianism, sabotage and censorship.

Birmingham Rock around the Blockade, meanwhile, has been on the streets every week with supporters from many different political trends, openly supporting Cuba and building the CSC. We have raised almost £300 for the Cuban people and spoken to hundreds of people about the ideas and social gains of the Cuban revolution. ■

Adam Sherwood

MANCHESTER

Meeting and discussion: Wednesday 1 November, 7.30pm, The Beerhouse, Angel St/Rochdale Road, Manchester (near City Centre)

BIRMINGHAM

Stall for Cuba, Saturday 21 October 12-2pm, top of New Street (near 'Shared Earth' Cafe). Followed by video and discussion. For details of further activities, contact the campaign on 0171 837 1688.

It is not too late to come on the brigade, which will be in Cuba from 21 December 1995 to 4 January 1996 (with the option of extending tickets for a further week). As well as working in agriculture alongside young Cubans, there will also be a programme of visits to hospitals, factories, cultural centres etc and two days in Havana. The only conditions we place on participation are support for the Cuban revolution and opposition to the illegal US blockade. The full cost for two weeks' participation on the brigade will be £650 and we will need £50 deposit ideally by 31 October. Contact the campaign at the address below for further details, or come to our planning meeting on 15 October (details above).

- ☐ I would like to come on the brigade to Cuba – please send more information
- ☐ I am not able to come on the brigade but would like to be involved in activities in solidarity with Cuba – please send me details
- ☐ I would like to make a donation to the campaign £ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Return to Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

Scottish CDC sets campaigning priorities

The Scottish Cuba Defence Campaign, the sister organisation of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign in England and Wales, is gearing itself up for a closer relationship with the CSC following its November 1995 AGM.

A first step will be, in considering the CSC Constitution, to amend the reference to supporting all brigades to Cuba to solely supporting CSC-organised brigades. Why? Surely the more people mobilised in solidarity with Cuba – whether through the CSC, Communist League's 'Youth Brigade' last year or FRFI's own Rock around the Blockade – the better? But what political principle can you expect from an SCDC whose idea of humour in its summer newsletter is to quip, apropos of an exercise bike that had to be left out of Aberdeen's contribution to the 1995 Container Appeal, that the Cubans would have been better off with a rowing machine?

Michael Taylor

FREDERICK ENGELS

Early Years

Engels was born into a wealthy textile manufacturing family in Bremen in the Rhineland. His family were leading members of the Pietist church, a Puritan sect, which has a belief in the literal truth of every word of the bible. He left school at 16 to take up an apprenticeship in the family firm. He became a skilled horseman, swordsman, swimmer and skater. As he wrote to a friend 'to get the most out of life you must be active, you must live and you must have the courage to taste the thrill of being young'. He also became involved in the 'Young Germany' literary movement, which believed in democracy and parliamentary government. Articles he wrote about the Pietist mill owners in Bremen in the Hamburg press caused controversy. He wrote 'terrible distress is prevalent among the lower classes, particularly the factory hands of the Wupper valley... In Elberfeld alone 1,200 out of 2,500 school age children are kept away from lessons and grow up in the factories.... However, the rich factory owners have an obliging conscience and letting a child go to more or less rack and ruin will not send a pietistic soul to hell, particularly if he goes to church twice every Sunday.'

In 1841 Engels volunteered for a year's military service and was stationed in Berlin. At the University there he attended lectures and came into contact with the 'Young Hegelians'. Hegel was a brilliant German philosopher who developed the theory of dialectics. This views every phenomenon as in a process of constant change and transformation. This process never stops; at each stage new conflicts occur which move the process forward and on to a new stage. This conflict between opposites gave revolutionary potential to Hegel's theory. But Hegel himself was an idealist who saw at the political apex of society the Prussian absolutist state. This limitation within Hegel's theory led to intense debate, with the Young Hegelians taking a radical progressive view of Hegel's philosophy. If all things develop and change why should there always be a Prussian king? This was a position that Engels supported and contributed to.

Condition of the Working Class in England

Engels' father, worried about the 'dangerous' political development of his son, decided in 1842 to send him to work in Manchester at a cotton mill in which Engels senior was a partner. Engels arrived in Manchester in November 1842, just after the end of a general strike in Lancashire against wage cuts and for the implementation of the six points of the Peoples' Charter. Manchester at that time was a centre of working class agitation and debate. Engels attended regular Sunday meetings at the Owenite Hall of Science and met the leaders of the local Chartist and workers' movement. He began collecting material for *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

It was at this time that Engels formed a relationship with Mary Burns, a woman from an Irish working class family. It is without doubt that Engels could not have written *The Condition...* without the help of Mary Burns in showing him round the areas where the Irish immigrant working class lived. Areas where 'the cottages are old, dirty and of the

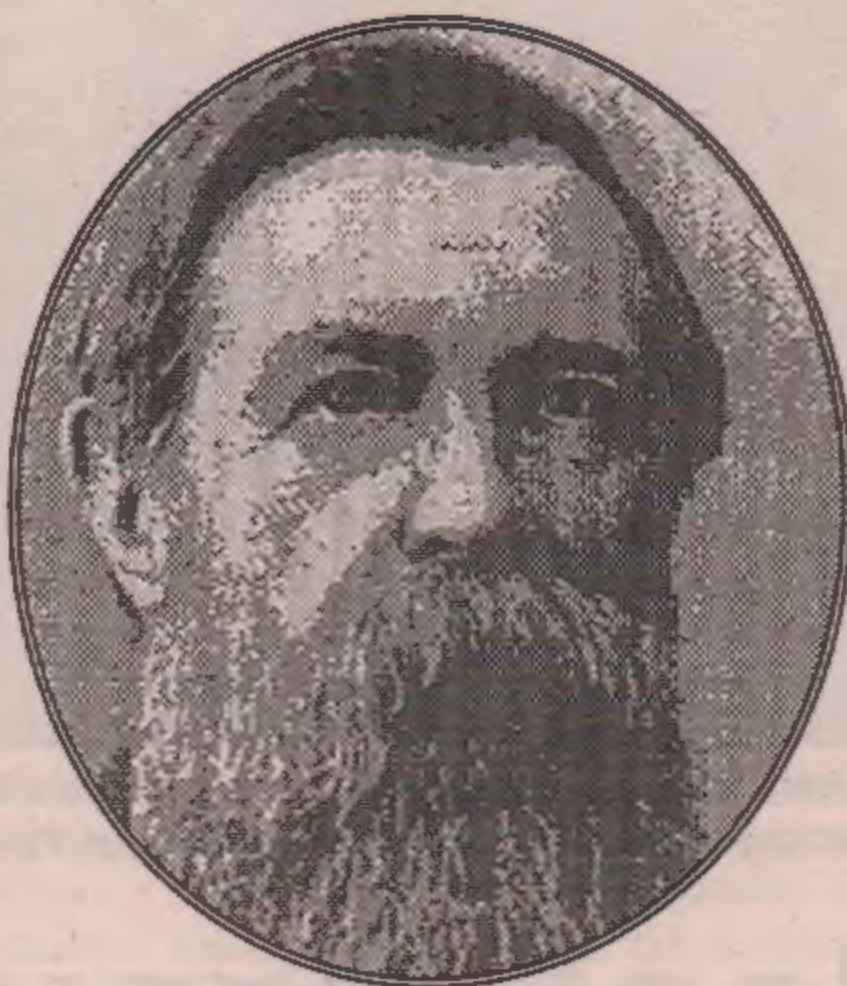
Frederick Engels was born on 28 November 1820. He died 100 years ago on 5 August 1895. During his lifetime, in collaboration with Karl Marx, he formulated the basis of modern

smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts and in part without drains or pavement; masses of refuse, offal and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions'. As Lenin said, 'Engels was the first in *The Condition...* to say that the proletariat is not only a suffering class, but it is in fact the disgraceful economic condition of the proletariat that drives it irresistibly forward and compels it to fight for its ultimate emancipation.' In 1844 Engels left Manchester and returned to Bremen where he put his material together and published *The Condition...*

Marx and Engels

1844 also began the lifetime partnership between Engels and Marx. They had both come to the same conclusion: that the working class was a revolutionary class, and that in freeing itself it would have to overturn the old bourgeois society. In 1847,

1820-1895



Friedrich Engels

May the paper had been shut down by Prussian reaction. Marx was deported, whilst Engels joined armed rebels in the south of Germany fighting the Prussian armies. The rebellion was soon crushed, and by 1850 both Marx and Engels were together in London. Engels moved back to work in Manchester at the cotton mill his father part-owned. For nearly twenty years he remained there, supporting and aiding Marx in London, a period Marx was to describe as Engels' years of 'storm and stress.'

Engels in Manchester

Engels set up house with his partner Mary Burns and her younger sister Lizzie. At the same time he had another 'official' residence for the conduct of business. Engels, though

scientific socialism – communism, where, 'men at last masters of their own mode of social organisation, consequently become at the same time masters of nature, masters of themselves – free.'

me and stood me in better stead at moments of crisis than all the refinement and culture of your educated and aesthetic young ladies.'

In 1860, Engels' father had died and four years later Engels became a junior partner in the family cotton mill. However, in 1869, he managed to arrange for his partner to buy him out. Marx's daughter describes Engels coming home after his last day at the mill: 'We saw him coming over the little field opposite the house where we lived. He was swinging his stick in the air and singing, his face beaming'. The following year Engels moved to London to work even more closely with Marx.

The International Working Men's Association had been formed in 1864 with Marx playing a leading role in drawing up its constitution and political line. Engels took over a lot of Marx's responsibilities in the IWMA. 1871 saw the Paris Commune, the first experiment in the dictatorship of

cal materialism. This states that it is material conditions that determine social consciousness but if the material conditions are changed, then social consciousness also changes. Dialectical materialism is a revolutionary philosophy of action.

After Marx's death

Marx died in 1883. Engels said, modestly, that he had played second fiddle to Marx. Yet he had pioneered positions on women's oppression, the family, science and military strategy. Now he had to take the lead, firstly by taking charge of Marx's literary legacy. He completed the historical task of sorting out and publishing volumes two and three of *Capital*. He played a leading role in the international socialist movement and the formation of the Second, socialist International in 1889. In Britain he worked with Marx's daughter Eleanor and her partner Edward Aveling in the formation of the 'new union' movement and in support of their activities amongst the workers of the East End. Engels never lost his revolutionary optimism, his disgust for the bourgeois respectability of sections of the English working class, or his faith in the 'masses'. Writing of the 'new unions' he said:

'The movement here is first of all a trade union movement but utterly different from that of the old trade unions of skilled labourers, the labour aristocracy. The people.... are drawing far greater masses into the struggle, shaking up society far more profoundly... The most repugnant thing here is the bourgeois "respectability" which has grown deep in the bones of the workers!'

As well as seeing the revolutionary potential of the 'new union' movement (even if it shortly became enmeshed with the old movement), Engels was adamant that the working class needed to form its own political party independent of the Liberals:

'In our tactics one thing is firmly established for all modern countries and times: to convince the workers of the necessity of forming their own independent party, opposed to all bourgeois parties.'

The role of the middle class left was the same then and now: as Engels commented, 'At a juncture when the workers for the first time came out independently, the Fabian Society advises them to remain the tail of the Liberals' – for Liberal now read Labour.

Engels died in London on 5 August 1895. True to his modest character he had requested cremation and that his ashes be scattered in the sea so that there would be no grave or monument. His monument is in fact his partnership with Marx in the development of scientific socialism – communism. As Lenin put it in his obituary to Engels:

'The services rendered by Marx and Engels to the working class may be expressed in a few words thus: they taught the working class to know itself and be conscious of itself, and they substituted science for dreams. That is why the name and life of Engels should be known to every worker.'

Bob Shepherd

In the next issue, Bob Shepherd will look at Engels' political standpoint in the last years of his life, in particular in his struggle against the political influence of the middle class and the privileged labour aristocracy.



Engels exposed the appalling condition of the working class – including young children – in Manchester's cotton mills

the Communist League at a conference in London commissioned Marx and Engels to 'draw up for publication a detailed theoretical and practical programme for the Party'. The *Communist Manifesto* was published in 1848. In it, Marx and Engels analysed the development of human society and showed that bourgeois society produces its own 'gravediggers', the working class.

Soon after the *Communist Manifesto* was published, the bourgeois February revolution began in Paris and spread to Germany and other parts of Europe. Marx and Engels moved to Cologne where they edited the paper *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, which supported the revolutionary movement. It was short-lived, and by

at times in hardship himself, financially supported Marx and his family in London allowing Marx to work on *Capital*. In 1867, the first volume was published, and Marx wrote to Engels: 'It is thanks to you alone that this has been possible. Without your enormous self-sacrifice for me I could never have done this enormous work... I embrace you full of thanks'. In 1863, Mary Burns died suddenly. Engels and Lizzie Burns subsequently formed a relationship that lasted until her death in 1878. Both Mary and Lizzie were Irish nationalists and supported the Fenian movement. Engels wrote of Lizzie: 'She was of genuine Irish proletarian stock and her passionate innate feelings for her class was of far greater value to

the proletariat. Although the IWMA was unable to give any real practical assistance, Marx wrote a declaration in defence of the Commune, arguing that its experience 'proved that the working class after having seized power must destroy the bourgeois state. The defeat of the Commune brought in a period of reaction and the IWMA was wound up in 1876.'

Marx's health began to deteriorate in the mid 1870s and Engels started to play a more prominent role. In 1878 he published *Anti-Duhring*, which has become second only to *Capital* in laying the basis of what is scientific socialism. The dialectical method developed by Hegel had been taken a stage further by Marx and Engels with their concept of dialecti-

Whitemoor dirty protest continues

In FRFI 126 we reported on the dirty and blanket protest waged by five Irish POWs in Whitemoor. For Feilim O hAdhmail, Martin McMonagle and Liam Heffernan this protest was successful, securing their transfer to prisons in the north of Ireland. But Michael O'Brien remains on dirty protest in Whitemoor's Special Secure Unit (SSU), and Pat Kelly has been refused a transfer following an operation for skin cancer, carried out at an outside hospital where he was chained to the bed and to a prison officer.

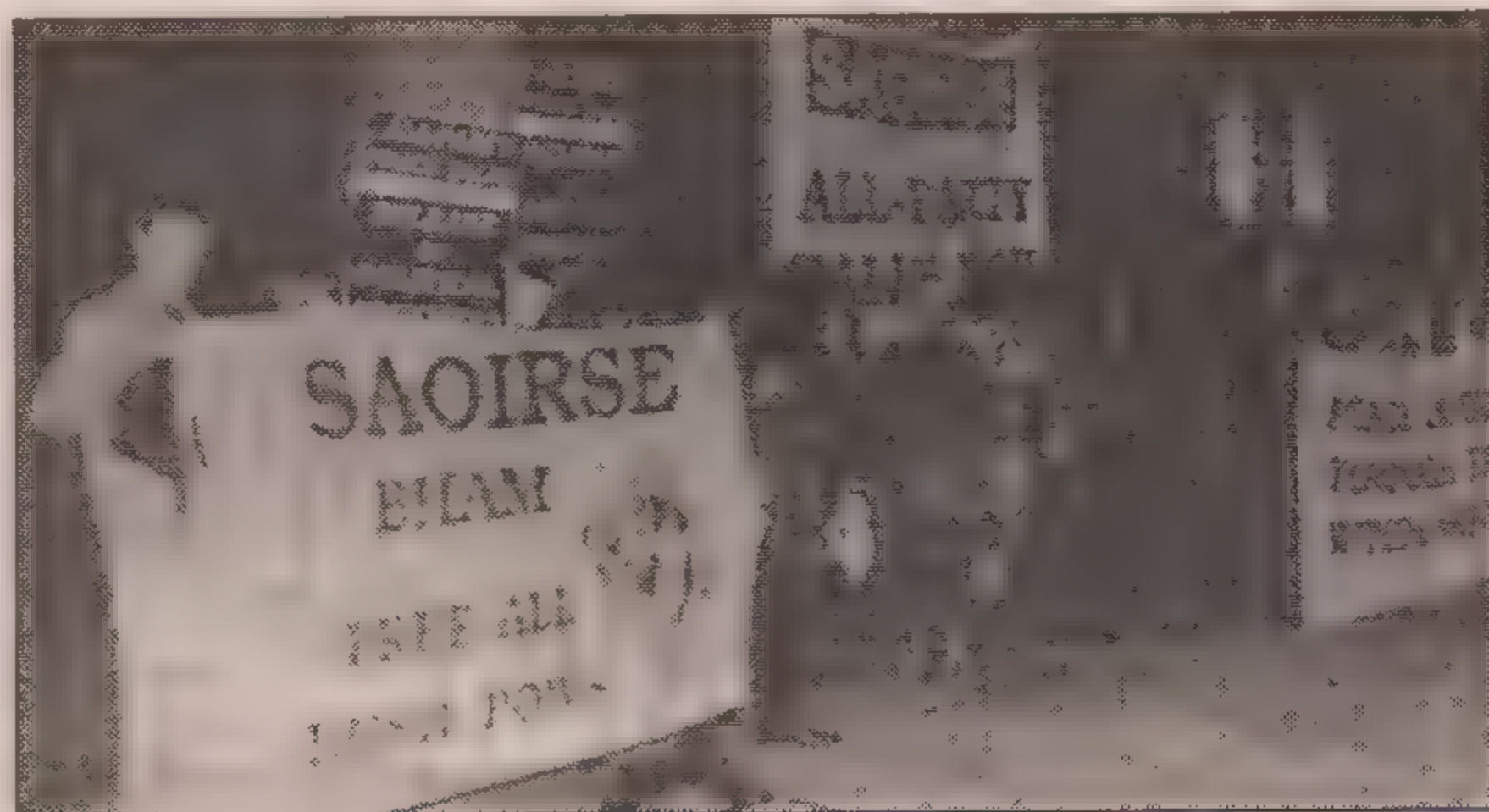
Not only POWs are protesting over their treatment in Whitemoor. In July (before the transfer of the three POWs) FRFI received this account from Dennis Prescott:

'Why does the prison not admit there are currently eight on a "dirty protest", English as well as Irish prisoners, who are on protest because of very oppressive conditions, being assaulted by screws, as in my case, plus being hundreds of miles away from their families? Is it not about time they started facing up to these truths?

'I've now been on "the blanket" and "dirty" for coming on two months, yet yesterday myself and POW Liam Heffernan were told by screws down the seg we won't be fed unless we wear prison clothes. Liam was deprived of his meal yesterday because of this. Taps have been turned off to stop washing and drinking.

'Pens, writing materials, reading glasses (!) etc, which have been asked for are not getting handed out to inmates. Food rations are being stolen ie sugar sachets and tea-bags, which we are entitled to.

'Statutory letters aren't handed out; this is in the hope we will com-



Saoirse continues to campaign for the release of all Irish prisoners of war

municate by asking for them. Visits have arrived and have been turned away. Screws telling them we've refused to go to the visits' area.

'There's a 64-year-old man next door to me on a "dirty": Ronald Easterbrook, who has only one lung. His door is being kicked in the middle of the night by screws saying "We haven't woke you up, have we?" How much does a man have to suffer?'

As we go to press there are still three men on dirty protest at White-

moor: Michael O'Brien (BT3782) in the SSU, Dennis Prescott (CF0338) and Ronald Easterbrook in the punishment block. We ask FRFI readers to send them cards and messages of solidarity to HMP Whitemoor, Longhill Road, March, Cambs, PE15 0PR, but to be aware that not all mail is reaching them and that their outgoing letters are being sent out in plastic bags with 'health warnings' designed to put the recipient off opening them.

oners' complaints at the best of times but react with even more scepticism and hostility if they are forced to have their communication mediated through campaigners. Prison Service and POA spokesmen already have the 'debate' on prisons sewn up; this measure just narrows the agenda still further.

Secondly, the definition of 'media' is deliberately wide so that different prison administrations can interpret it in any way they wish.

Some of those most threatened by the new censorship are framed prisoners who rely on maintaining good relations with journalists to keep their campaigns in the public eye. At Long Lartin six framed prisoners staged a ten-day hunger-strike and protest in August against the new measures and the fact that their mail both to journalists and to and from solicitors was being stopped or delayed. In September Full Sutton prisoners met a wing governor to discuss grievances including restrictions on phone-card use and access to the press; the prison responded by moving those involved either to the punishment block or to other prisons. ■

Nicki Jameson

Hanging on the telephone

On 21 June the Prison Service set about rebuilding the wall of secrecy which has always surrounded British prisons but had been chipped away in the 1970s and 80s, as prisoners won the right to communicate with anyone they chose by letter. In the years since the Strangeways uprising visits were increased, much routine censorship ended and cardphones were introduced.

Already galled by the use of prison telephones by high-profile prisoners like Winston Silcott and Kiranjit Ahluwalia to give interviews about their cases, the final straw for the Prison Service came when Keith Rose rang a Radio Four phone-in and explained to the public how and why he and two others broke out of Parkhurst earlier this year. The Prison Service did not wish to be reminded of the Parkhurst escape and responded rapidly with Instruction to Governors IG/3/95:

'To minimise the risk of prisoners improperly using the cardphone system to contact the media and the difficulties of curtailing such calls because of the immediacy of their transmission Standing Order 5 has

been amended to disallow prisoners from making any communications of this kind. For the purposes of this instruction "the media" should be construed as any person or place associated with broadcasting or publication of material.'

At present no new restrictions have been introduced on written communication but, even as it stands, this is dangerous stuff. Firstly, as those of us know who have battled on the outside against the hysterical anti-prisoner mood of the recent 'crisis' to at least attempt to have alternative voices heard on TV, radio and in national newspapers, there is a far greater chance of success if those voices are 'real, live' ones. Most journalists are unlikely to listen to pris-

self-defence, and whose appeal will finally be heard on 20 October. On 10 September Satpal was put in Full Sutton's punishment block on a spurious charge of insulting a prison officer. He refused to attend a kangaroo court hearing and was 'sentenced' to two weeks punishment, during which he was denied bedding and exercise and went on hunger-strike in protest. Satpal's supporters inundated the

prison with phonecalls and faxes, contacted the press and picketed the prison.

Send letters of support to Satpal Ram (E94164), HMP Full Sutton, Moor Lane, York, YO4 1PS. Attend the demonstration outside the appeal hearing on Friday 20 October, from 9.30am at the High Court, Strand, London, WC2. For transport details telephone 0121 507 1618.

FREE SATPAL RAM!

Many freed framed prisoners will confirm that the most harassment they received in prison, apart from initially after conviction, was immediately before their release, when the system demanded its last pound of flesh. Such is the case for Satpal Ram, who has battled for nine years to overturn a murder conviction for killing a racist in

Shotts

If anyone should wonder exactly what Michael Howard ultimately has in store for the prison system, they need look no further than Shotts prison in Lanarkshire, where the process of screwing down conditions and basic rights has now reached its definitive conclusion. Prisoners everywhere should take serious heed of what is going down at Shotts and recognise for what it is: the ultimate blueprint for long-term prison regimes of the 1990s, unless resistance is organised now.

Opened in the early 1980s as a showcase maximum security prison, Shotts, with its state-of-the-art prison architecture and modern 'living units', was intended to replace the fortress-like Peterhead as Scotland's main long-term prison. Whereas Peterhead, with its traditional strong convict culture and history of rebellion, had always been recognised as a 'cons' nick - somewhere where the balance of institutional power had long shifted in the prisoners' favour after decades of open resistance and confrontation - Shotts was created to restore power to the gaolers within a physical environment purpose-built for small-group control and total surveillance.

Virtually from day one prisoners were confronted by a megalomaniac administration and a regime of unremitting harassment and bullying. New 'anti-drug initiatives' were used as a cover for systematic abuse and humiliation of prisoners and their visitors; visitors were, and still are, frequently strip-searched, including the elderly and small children, and prisoners have to submit to an anal search after leaving visits.

It was this sort of inhuman treatment that caused an explosion of rage in 1987 when prisoners revolted and attempted to wreck the institution. And it was as a direct result of the barbaric methods employed to put down the uprising and regain long-term control of the gaol that the prison exploded again in 1992. Following the second uprising, the administration decided to lock down the gaol permanently and literally cage up its inmates, so turning the prison to its always-intended use as one mass control-unit.

John Brannan, a prisoner at Shotts, recently described the current situation:

'Each Hall has now been divided up into six sections, each containing 20 prisoners who are caged as a group into a tiny self-contained area that is sealed almost the whole time by locked grille gates. The screws remain beyond the gates, entering the sections only to lock us up in our cells when and if necessary. We only leave the sections for work and are made to walk in strict single file to the work-sheds, usually through a barrage of abuse and threats from young macho screws, screaming at prisoners to get their hands out of

their pockets or get their shirts tucked in. The atmosphere of bullying is something that you're up against here day and night.

'Tension within the living sections, where prisoners are cooped up in small groups, is really bad and guys just pace up and down all the time full of anger and paranoia. The screws obviously feel safe and in control with everyone locked up behind gates and have dished out so much shit since the lockdown was enforced that they're now too frightened to open up the gates and deal with us as a larger group, face to face. People here are being seriously damaged mentally while the lockdown continues, and I think that few of us will ever be able to readjust to normal life again.'

In 1994 the Scottish Inspectorate for Prisons strongly criticised the lockdown at Shotts, describing it as unjustified in its present permanent form, and urged the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) to begin operating an open regime. That criticism and recommendation have so far been ignored.

The regime at Shotts is not some temporary aberration or contingency measure forced on an unwilling administration by the actions of dangerous and unmanageable prisoners - it is the established means by which large groups of long-term prisoners in Scotland are being controlled and managed. In fact, Shotts was recently designated by the SPS as Scotland's main induction centre for long-term prisoners, somewhere to 'screen' and 'process' them before their allocation to other prisons. It is from this 'basic regime', designed to crush spirits and root out potential leaders that all long-term prisoners now have to 'graduate'.

This is the sort of prison envisaged by Michael Howard when he talks about 'austere regimes' and 'making prisoners earn privileges' and this is what all prisoners throughout Britain face unless they resist and fight back.

Prisoners have fought and suffered for decades in their struggle for human rights and civilised conditions, and it is a fight that must continue and be supported with ever greater determination at this critical time when the state is launching probably its most vicious assault yet on those rights and conditions.

John Bowden, HMP Perth

Deaths in prison

Self-inflicted and other non-natural deaths 8 July to 26 September 1995:

Thomas Inglis, 37, HMP Bedford - slashed wrists
Christopher Smith, 35, Long Lartin - beaten to death in cell
Robert Conlin, 22, Garth - hanged
Paul Clark, 26, Blundeston - hanged
M Massaquoi, 22, Highdown - hanged
Paul Egan, 24, Norwich - cause unknown
Tony Bashforth, 39, Doncaster - cause unknown
John Birney, 32, Blundeston - hanged
Muttavel Vasanthan, 25, Norwich -

hanged [Sri Lankan asylum-seeker - fourth death in Norwich prison this year]
Andrew de Kock, 22, Highdown - hanged
Peter Williams, 19, Aylesbury - hanged
Paul Clark, Gartree - found dead in cell; prisoners say he was vomiting and ringing bell for attention earlier in the evening but was ignored
Barry Wilkinson, 45 - died in Group 4 van between Leicester and Ranby prisons, the second such death
Terence Flanagan, 30, Strangeways - found dead on floor of health-care centre

Information provided by Inquest, Prison Watch and Mark Stoner-Seed.

'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.'

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

A hurricane threatens to blow through the world's financial system. Not since before the Second World War have the portents looked so ominous for international capitalism. A mountain of debt overhangs a stagnant production base. Vast speculative sums send currencies careering on a switchback ride. Something big and very dangerous is happening.

TREVOR RAYNE examines the prospect of a meltdown.

Tom Wolfe's novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* has Wall Street bond trader Sherman McCoy, 'salary like a telephone number', 'Master of the Universe', trapped by circumstances he cannot understand or control. Every way he turns disaster encroaches on him, a disaster mirrored all around in the crazy, bizarre ruination of New York City. The book was published in 1987, the year \$500 billion was wiped off Wall Street shares. McCoy and New York are allegories of the decline of the dollar and the US economy.

Commenting on the 16 September 1992 debacle when sterling left the Exchange Rate Mechanism, despite the Bank of England spending billions, Samuel Brittan wrote that it was as if the Chancellor of the Exchequer 'had personally thrown entire hospitals and schools into the sea all afternoon'. The former chair of the US Federal Reserve Paul Volcker, describing how exchange rate instability makes rational investment decisions impossible, remarked: 'The answer, to me, must be that such large swings are a symptom of a system in disarray'.

'Disarray': a monument to banking finesse, as though a tie, not quite straight, needed adjusting. The truth is triumphant capitalism is in chaos.

We are in a period of renewed inter-imperialist rivalries centred on the USA, Japan and Germany. In 1987 the USA sounded the trumpets of impending trade war with Japan. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc 1989-91 the political and military restraints on Germany and Japan that benefited US capitalism loosened. While the USA footed the defence bill for their protection, German and Japanese capitalists accepted US trade and exchange rate policy and subsidised the dollar. Now this factor is diminished, revealing sharply that capitalism has no anchor country, no anchor currency, no overriding stabilising power such as it had in the last century when Britain and sterling performed this role, or in the period after 1945 when the USA and the dollar were the anchor.

The US' economy has weakened relative to Japan's and Germany's. The dollar, the main currency for world trade, no longer serves so much as an international store of value as a weapon wielded for the benefit of US exports and capital. The loss of an anchor, the reduced US ability to cajole and coerce, adds to the financial instability.

The fantastic sums involved in currency speculation (\$600 billion a day in 1990, \$1 trillion a day today) feed on and add to the instability. From speculation being a bubble on the back of production, production has become a bubble on the back of

speculation. \$1 trillion a day is 20-30 times the amount of trade in goods plus services.

If the world's most powerful governments act in concert they can manage \$14 billion a day to combat speculators. Combined industrialised countries' currency reserves are \$550 billion, half the daily trading volume in exchange deals. Once, speculators listened to central bankers for hints on where to bet, now George Soros, fund manager and speculator, utters that the franc and Deutschmark will fall and they fall. A Master of the Universe.

In 1992 Soros bet \$10 billion on the Deutschmark against the pound and lira. He made \$2 billion profit in two weeks!

This loan-funded speculation has grown precisely as capital accumulation, as investment in production, has slowed, particularly in the USA and Britain. Speculative capital grows as capital decays. The *Harvard Business Review* estimates that for every dollar or its equivalent circulating in the world's productive economy \$20-50 now circulates in the world of pure finance. Money making money in the blink of an electronic eye. This money is a parasitical claim to real wealth.

As capital accumulation has slowed, so governments have been forced to increase their borrowings to pay for welfare, education, defence, etc. In 1978 public debt of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (industrialised) countries averaged 40 per cent of Gross Domestic Product. In 1988 it was 54 per cent and 1994 70 per cent. Governments borrow from giant banks, investment and pension funds and multinational companies that move money through the speculative markets. They borrow by issuing bonds.

With increased government reliance on borrowing so dependence on the speculative funds grows. Ever more profitable rates have to be offered consuming more and more government revenues: thus Norman Lamont throwing hospitals and schools into the sea. Last year the US bond market crashed as the dollar fell against the yen. Investors took money out of dollar-denominated US bonds. To repair the bond market long term interest rates were raised. 'Hot money' retreated from Mexican investments back to the higher US rates. A run on the Mexican peso followed. Stock markets around the world wobbled. The biggest international rescue of all time, almost \$50 billion, was organised to steady the peso. \$50 billion of hospitals and schools thrown down the mouths of speculators, while the Mexican economy shrinks 5 per cent this year and armed guards are posted outside the department stores.

If recoveries do not emerge soon, bond and currency markets will force

cuts in real public expenditure, shocking millions who have staked their lives on the promise that politicians would protect them from economic difficulty'.

Thus speak investment advisers. They cite Sweden, held up like a trophy, where speculation forced government spending cuts of 20 billion krona in a year to ward off a banking collapse, equal to a quarter of Swedish expenditure on health.

In 1993 speculators turned on the French franc. The German and French central banks spent \$50 billion defending it. These are real reductions in governments' financial resources. French foreign currency reserves fell \$17 billion in a week. Where did the money go? Primarily to French banks, investment funds etc.

tion, which such as Will Hutton condemn as the 'short termism' of the City, is symptomatic of a crisis of accumulation, of profitability, of decaying and parasitical capitalism, of imperialism.

1929 and today

Some features of the 1929 Crash are relevant to understanding today.

The First World War ended London's domination of international finance without then establishing New York as successor, just as today the dollar diminishes without the yen supplanting it. In the 1930's the Bank of England was unable to prevent the Wall Street Crash producing a banking collapse in central Europe, a run on sterling and the ultimate departure of sterling from the gold

biggest creditor nation and it has the biggest trade surplus. The USA is the biggest debtor nation and it has the biggest trade deficit. A symmetry where only names change.

This imbalance provokes the drive towards protectionism and formation of trade blocs, as it did in the 1920-30s when world trade fell by 65 per cent: the Great Depression.

Thirdly, no country could in the 1920-30s - nor can they now - absorb large surpluses of unsold goods, expand credit at a sufficient rate to counter recessionary trends, ensure exchange rate stability through purchases or sales of currency, impose its will on different governments, for example to collectively inflate or deflate. No one can play the role of locomotive to drive the world economy forward.

Fourthly, in the late 1920s while stock markets boomed agricultural prices fell, particularly in the colonies, and automobile and property prices slumped in the period before the 1929 Crash. Stagnant and falling prices are evident today in Britain, the USA and Japan.

US position undermined

Following World War Two the USA dominated the world economy. At the Bretton Woods Conference in New Hampshire in 1944 the USA, with Britain, planned the IMF and World Bank to regulate international financial relations. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was intended to regulate trade.

The dollar, the anchor currency, was tied to gold at \$35 to one ounce. Other major capitalist currencies were fixed against the dollar with margins for adjustment, to be agreed with the US-dominated IMF. For every \$35 presented by a central bank to the USA, the USA had to present one ounce of gold. The USA had up to 70 per cent of world gold stocks to meet claims.

For twenty-five years the capitalist world had growth and stability seldom if ever seen before. Between 1947-67 Britain, France, West Germany and Japan together averaged 6.4 per cent growth per annum, the USA 3.6 per cent. From 1960-73 OECD economies grew on average 4.8 per cent per annum, exports by 8.8 per cent. From 1973-87 economic growth slowed to 2.6 per cent and export growth to 4.2 per cent. For the US economy from 1950-73 the average growth rate was 3.7 per cent, but from 1973-94 it was just 2.4 per cent. Stagnation and instability were returning by the late 1960s.

US-financing of the Vietnam War, together with a series of US budget deficits which heralded the failure of 'Keynesian' economics, resulted in a surfeit of dollars circulating relative to gold reserves held. An unofficial rate emerged alongside the official gold rate. Fears that the US Treasury would be unable to meet its gold-dollar commitments led central banks and others to sell dollars.

Between 1971 and 1973 the Bretton Woods currency model unravelled. The dollar was floated in the

Melt



Panicked depositors stormed the Kizu Credit Union, Japan

Crises

For 400 years financial crises erupted in the capitalist system every ten years or so. Periodic crises reflect a crisis in accumulation where profitable investment opportunities dry up, with an over-production of capital driving down the rate of profit and intensifying competition for world markets and resources. Excess capital has to be exported or deployed on the stock market and in speculation to avoid a profits collapse. The top six US banks derive 40 per cent of their total profits trading currencies and securities. Similar proportions obtain for UK banks. Speculation drives up asset prices way beyond what the levels of income they generate should warrant, leading to stock market, derivatives, bond or currency booms. This is accompanied by scrambling for markets and investments overseas.

In the past ten years foreign direct investment by multinationals has quadrupled, twice the growth in world trade. Portfolio investment (share holdings) in developing countries increased seven fold since 1990. UK overseas investment doubled from 1991 to \$30 billion in 1994. This is money seeking returns of 20-30 per cent, twice those expected in Britain.

This export of capital and specula-

standard in 1931. Today the central banks, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are increasingly enfeebled in the face of speculation.

Two financial centres may coexist for a time, but one tends to supplant the other. In capitalism's history Venice was replaced by Antwerp, Antwerp by Genoa, Genoa by Amsterdam, Amsterdam by London and London by New York. The financial centre serves as lender of last resort, bailing out major bad debtors, holding reserves that reinforce the system. But what happens when the centre cannot hold?

Secondly, the period before the 1929 Crash saw huge trade imbalances resulting in a steep rise in indebtedness. Britain's debts to the USA rose to half Britain's national product, Germany's to one and a half times its national product. The international financial structure depended on credit flows from the USA to Europe. If they stopped the structure would and did collapse. Now, for over twenty years, the USA has depended on capital flowing from Japan and Europe.

In the 1920s the USA was the world's major creditor nation and it had the biggest trade surplus. Germany was the biggest debtor nation and it had the biggest trade deficit. Today, Japan is the world's

down

market and rapidly devalued with gold prices rising to over \$800 an ounce. With the dollar devaluing the Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (OPEC) quadrupled the price of oil. Oil is priced in dollars. The fortunes made by oil producers were deposited in the imperialist banks and lent on to Third World countries. Third World interest payments would meet the industrialised countries' higher fuel bills.

From 1971 to 1981 Third World debt grew from about \$70 billion to \$600 billion. Its service costs rose from under \$20 billion to over \$120 billion a year. By 1993 Third World public and private debt was \$1.77 trillion. Absolutely unpayable, even when over 30 per cent of these countries' export earnings are taken in debt repayments. They can hardly be drained of more wealth. In 1980 one in four Latin Americans lived in poverty. In 1990 one in three. Africa spends four times as much on debt repayments as on health care. Bank lending has been redirected towards the industrial countries and speculation.

The President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development observed, 'The signs of America's relative decline are converging and unquestionable. Japanese productivity is increasing at three times the US rate, while European productivity increases at twice the US rate'. Ten lawyers graduate in the USA for each engineer. In Japan ten engineers graduate for every lawyer. Germany has double the number of scientists and engineers per capita that the USA has. With its relatively decaying productive sector, when the USA expanded state spending in the 1980s with military budgets running up to \$300 billion a year to try and break the Soviet Union, the results were predictable. As Fidel Castro observed of the process, it may have broken the Soviet Union but the effort may break the USA next.

Huge state borrowings and trade deficits appeared. Over the past fifteen years the cumulative US trade deficit is \$1.68 trillion. By the mid-1980s the USA needed capital imports of \$120 billion a year, much of it from Japan and Europe. US national debt rose 342 per cent in the 1980s. Total US debt grew faster than income. By 1992 government borrowing took 70 per cent of all new credit. Total US indebtedness relative to national income is far higher now than it was in 1929.

Interest payments on US government debt grew from 10 per cent of GNP in 1980 to 18 per cent in 1992, consuming 62 per cent of federal income tax. This is an unsustainable position. US foreign debt is 200 per cent higher than exports, like Mexico's in 1982 when the Third World debt crisis broke on the

world's financial markets.

At recent rates of growth US debt repayments on some estimates would consume all the US GNP by 2015. But debt cannot grow faster than output and income forever. There comes a time of reckoning.

In 1985 the USA became the biggest debtor nation and Japan the biggest creditor. To reduce the US trade deficit the major capitalist nations signed the 1985 Plaza Agreement. Central banks would manipulate the dollar down and Japan would expand its economy with low interest rates. Germany and Japan agreed to a devalued dollar rather than face a tariff threat from the USA. The dollar fell 25 per cent and kept on falling as speculators sold it on. The yen and Deutschmark rose, but the US trade deficit was not solved.



Manila, the Philippines: people scavenge in the rubbish

Shadow from Japan

'In all our careless dealings with other people there comes a time of accounting' - from a Japanese novel.

Following the Plaza Agreement Japanese interest rates were cut. Surplus capital poured into property speculation. During 1986-87 Tokyo real estate prices rose 80 per cent. A single prefecture was said to be worth more than all of Canada. By the end of 1987 the unit price of Japanese land was fifty times that of the USA.

Soaring land prices served as collateral to expand credit at home and overseas. Japanese banks became the biggest in the world. Loans raised on land went into the share market. In the early 1970s the stock market value of the US firm IBM was greater than the entire Japanese stock market. By the end of 1989 the Japanese

telephone monopoly NTT was worth more than the entire German stock market.

Debt piled up on Japanese property and stocks grew far beyond what could be serviced from their yields. Neither the prices nor the dividends were sufficient to pay the debts. In 1990 Nikkei Dow share prices fell 49 per cent. Over 1991-92 Japanese property prices fell 50 per cent. Japanese companies and property owners were left with a massive case of negative equity. Bad debt has mounted; figures vary according to source, but Japanese banks face about \$568 billion in bad loans potentially rising in one forecast to over \$1 trillion, a quarter of the GNP. Official figures show up to 16 per cent of banks' loans currently in default. Any further drop in property prices will increase bad debt.

Writing in *The Guardian* Edward Balls states that the Japanese 'economy is on the verge of a dangerous deflationary spiral of falling consumer and asset prices, rising debts and falling output unseen in either the US or Europe in the post-war period'. Land and commercial prices continue to fall. In 1995 Sumitomo was the first major Japanese bank to declare a loss since 1945. Five financial institutions have either collapsed or been rescued by the state this year. Japanese industry is operating 21-25 per cent below capacity; factories are closing. The high yen has exacerbated the problem.

Japan's problems pose a two-fold threat to international capitalism: an international financial collapse and trade war. Eight of the ten biggest banks in the world are Japanese. Japan is the world's biggest creditor nation. Any change in Japanese banks has implications for the whole world. The newly merged Tokyo Mitsubishi bank has assets of \$701.3 billion. Only a handful of countries have national products greater. The UK's GNP is approximately \$900 billion.

Japanese banks accounted for a quarter of the world's credit creation in the past decade. With the rising yen and falling dollar Japanese companies bought US assets. Japanese investors bought 30 per cent of US Treasury long term bonds in the 1980s. They lent to the USA. Considering the scale of US indebtedness, a break in the chain of credits, a withdrawal of Japanese funds, could trigger a row of defaults, credit implosion, meltdown.

If Japan were to retaliate against efforts to force it to cut its trade surplus by withdrawing \$10 billion from the many billions it has invested in US bonds it would trigger a crash. It is estimated that the Japanese have lost between \$350-500 billion on investments overseas since 1985 due to the fall in the dollar.

It is not just a domestic banking



Rockefeller Center, Manhattan: now owned by the Japanese

crisis that might force Japanese investors to sell property overseas to get liquidity that could cause a crash. As the world's biggest debtor the USA is bound to supply more dollars onto world markets and Japanese investors are likely to sell dollar assets fearing more losses as the dollar falls even further than the 75 per cent it has dropped against the yen since 1985.

Protectionism

'Flirting with protectionism is flirting with world catastrophe' - Leonard Silk, former economic correspondent of the New York Times.

Imperialism's growing instability and imbalances are producing the customary scapegoats and drive towards protectionism. The 1990 Japanese stock market crash was blamed on a 'Jewish conspiracy'. The 1993 run on the franc blamed by French politicians on an 'Anglo-Saxon conspiracy'. *Le Monde* opined 'German selfishness is the root of the problem'. In 1992 Norman Lamont blamed the President of the Bundesbank for deliberately weakening sterling with reckless remarks. Now we have several European Union finance ministers accusing Britain, Italy and Spain of gaining unfair trading advantage by devaluing their currencies.

The conspiracy of cohorts sharing out profits gives way to a fight of hostile brothers trying to off-load losses onto each other. Since 1990 there have been the following trade disputes: French soybeans versus USA; Japanese rice versus USA; US sugar versus the world; European airlines versus USA; Asian steel versus USA; European Union public work contracts versus USA; Japanese luxury cars versus USA. Opening skirmishes in a trade war.

Responding to a Japanese government statement that the USA should not use protectionist measures US Trade Representative Mickey Kantor said, 'I'm not interested in theology'. Asked by *Le Monde* if the European Union should launch a trade war the then President Mitterrand replied 'If pushed, I hope so'.

Since 1970 the yen/dollar exchange rate has gone from 358 yen to the dollar to 100 yen to the dollar. Still Japan is on target for \$146 billion trade surplus this year and the USA headed for a \$182 billion deficit. Pushing the dollar down and the yen and Deutschmark up has not solved a thing. That is why trade war is imminent. Japan is so dependent on exports that it will deepen the slump in Japan which will speed the coming of the crash.

Alternatively, pushing the yen ever higher and the dollar further down will likely have the same effect as, for example, the Mazda Motor Corporation estimates it loses \$25 million a year for every one yen rise against the dollar. A continuing rise in the yen is likely to have a depressing effect on the Japanese economy leading to more Japanese investment in the Pacific region. A regional confrontation with the USA is foreseeable. However, should the yen fall against the dollar for any length of time, as it has done recently, then the Japanese trade surplus will grow and trade battles with the USA will intensify. A double-bind. Trapped.

This is the context in which the clamour for a Japanese apology for the Second World War is made and in which US President Clinton remembers Hiroshima by saying he would have dropped the bomb too.

A vision of the future

An investment advice firm offers its potential clients a glimpse of the near future.

'An unstoppable wedge is about to be driven through the heart of Britain. It is a wedge of technology and culture that will divide this nation into two very different parts: the haves and have-nots...those who make the leap into the economy of the future and profit, and those who are left behind, trapped in dying areas and a dying economy...

'In one part, crime will spread. Homes will be boarded up. Gangs of fatherless young men and boys will roam the streets. People will live shorter, meaner, poorer lives. Property prices will fall...entire areas will be abandoned.

'Sounds like an inner-city ghetto? Think again. This may be your street 10 years from now. Because the same plague that has destroyed the inner cities is spreading to the suburbs...

'Meanwhile, just a few hours' drive from these living nightmares will be some of the finest environments ever created on the planet. These enclaves of peace and prosperity will be protected by geographic and electronic fortifications...

'The Death of Public Services... Government budgets will soon be slashed - and that means spending on public services will be cut more than they already have been. Streets will become no more than broken pavement and dirt. Buildings will burn down for lack of fire protection... Private companies will step in to do the work public services used to do. And you'll be able to profit by investing in them, too...

'Soon there will be more than 100 different wars being fought around the world. But there is a profit opportunity here, too. One company has recently developed a machine to detect plastic explosives used by terrorists...

'Retirement savings evaporate... As the pound falls, shares and bonds will come crashing down too. The retirement savings of many millions of people will be ruined...

'We're not worried about being politically correct. We don't make moral judgements. We just aim to make you money.'

This is the barbarism that capitalism has planned for us - we must and we will resist.

The need for working class representation

As we move towards the next general election, one fact is self-evident: the working class lacks any independent voice. There is as yet no party or movement capable of representing its class interests. *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* has consistently argued the need for such an organisation, one which could unite all those local campaigns which have fought issues of working class concern, and which in the course of their struggles have had to come up against the Labour Party. There can be little argument with the statement that creating such an organisation, one which can start to organise working class struggle independently of, and against, New Labour is the most urgent task facing socialists and communists today.

It is therefore gratifying to find that we are not alone in recognising this necessity. Recently, Red Action, with support from comrades in Anti-Fascist Action, have launched an initiative calling for the formation of an independent working class organisation. Participants in the initiative are a number of small left-wing groups who have a record of opposing the Labour Party. A series of meetings have revealed a broad measure of agreement on the initiative, which would seek to set up an Independent Working Class Association (IWCA). The political basis for this association is set out in a document called, quite appropriately, *The Moment of Truth*. This makes a number of points:

- 'Labour is a middle class party for middle class people';
- 'The first step toward reaching the unorganised working class is to organise the unorganised anti-Labour left';
- 'The working class is increasingly alienated from Labour. It is not the job of working class militants to mend this relationship as some clearly believe. On the contrary, the task is to accelerate its decline - make it permanent';
- 'Many on the left both inside and outside the Labour Party unerringly line up behind the class enemy in defence of the status quo. Though they present themselves as subversive radicals, by any definition they are conservative. Their one consistent message is that a politically independent working class is not only impossible but undesirable';
- 'Now more than ever, the working class needs its political independence. Furthermore, what it needs is an independent working class organisation... For without organisation, the working class has no voice. Without a voice there can be no resistance'.

The document is quite clear about the political character of the proposed association: 'A working class organisation not only independent of but hostile to Labour.' It 'will be a clean break with the past and will be seen to be so'; it will not 'orientate toward the trade unions or seek solace from the official "Labour Movement"'. There is no opposition to workplace organisation; far from it - the opposition to a trade union orientation exists because it is the way many on the left seek to avoid coming to terms with their relationship to Labour. Yet at the same time, the association will be 'community-oriented and in time community based', since the present-day role of the trade unions is to prevent any form of independent working class action let alone organisation.

The whole tone of the document is therefore very positive. It also represents something of a break for Red Action, which has tended to avoid the sort of direct political engagement with Labour and its defenders that the document now proposes. Instead, it has preferred to go straight into working class communities, primarily to build active opposition to fascist organisations. Although there are positive aspects to this, it is also a very hard option to pursue. There have been working class struggles which have taken place over the last few years, which have thrown up some campaigns and other forms of local organisation, such as Min-

ers' Support Groups. It is perhaps a recognition of the severe limits of the earlier more immediate approach to the working class that has led the IWCA to support the idea of canvassing support for the new association from existing working class campaigns and organisations in order to give it real substance.

Overall, the timing of the initiative is very opportune. Jack Straw's recent comments about clearing 'winos, addicts and squeegee merchants' off the street displays an utter hostility to the working class, because he is rejecting with a callous indifference the most vulnerable working class casualties of the crisis. No matter that he later talked about financing



Jack Straw, the 'caring' face of New Labour

community care properly, or expressed support for more detox units. Given New Labour's complete opposition to any increase in welfare spending, such statements were for those who desperately want to continue supporting Labour without over-troubling their consciences.

Yet time and again the mask of New Labour slips and behind it we see the naked face of capital. In by-election campaigns they are showing themselves to be to the right of the Liberal Democrats. At Littleworth in the summer, they attacked the Lib Dems for being a party of high taxation, in particular for their proposals for increased education spending. They also criticised the Lib Dems for proposing a free advisory service for immigrants at their port of entry and a review body to investigate and act upon immigrants' complaints. The message was clear: vote Labour if you are a racist. This campaigning approach is no aberration: it has been recently repeated in a London council by-election. New Labour's increasingly vociferous attacks on single parents, their



Brothers in arms

recently-discovered concern for 'welfare fraud' chimes in well with capital's concern to cut all forms of welfare spending.

And what of those inside and outside of Labour who like to think of themselves as 'subversive radicals'? Ken Livingstone for instance, Red Ken of yore. Oh, he was upset at the campaign Labour fought in Littleworth. But fawning on Tony Blair in *The Guardian*, he wrote 'I found nothing in the law and order documents produced by Tony and his team that I disagreed with,' continuing: 'they were nothing like as reactionary as the spin doctors had claimed.' OK, so Tony Blair is the most right-wing leader Labour has ever had. But that's no bad thing; it's better to have a decisive leader than the 'compromisers and wafflers from Wilson to Kinnock'. So, who knows, 'We may therefore find to our surprise that Blair could yet deliver a Labour Government of which socialists could be proud if he is prepared to take on the vested interests of the city.'

So Red Ken has nothing more to offer than the hope of a surprise. Meanwhile Jack Straw has made it clear what New Labour really means by 'law and order', even if Red Ken does not find it too reactionary. But of course Red Ken is not alone. Paul Foot is another radical who doesn't want to break with New Labour. In fact he specifically attacks what he describes as the 'small minority' who 'argue that Labour has lost all claim to the allegiance of working class votes, and that there is no longer any substance in the claim that Labour has links and roots in the working class.' Instead he repeats a set of hoary old fictions: 'In its basic electoral support and in its links with the unions, Labour is still a party with working class roots. When Labour does well at the polls, its worker supporters feel better, more confident; and when Labour goes down, its supporters go down as well.' OK, provided you accept that 'worker supporters' exclude the poor sections of the working class, black people and never-married mothers.

Foot supports New Labour because he believes it will make a difference; in his view, 'because of the history and origin of the party, because the party rests on trade union support, because of the people who vote Labour, because Labour Party members are overwhelmingly workers, all Labour governments must try and do something for those who vote Labour.' Small point of fact: Labour Party members in their majority hold degrees and in their overwhelming majority are members of the professional middle class. That a New Labour Government will try and do something for such middle class voters is probably true. That it will do so at the expense of the working class is beyond doubt.

Foot makes great play about what he describes as New Labour's paralysis, its refusal to challenge the Tories or to support the working class. In reality of course, New Labour is not paralysed; New Labour is confidently, even arrogantly, asserting the rights and privileges of the middle class. What is in paralysis is the left. When Foot says that 'in the next general election at least, there will be no credible left alternative to Labour' he is saying that the left, or the SWP, cannot and must not challenge it. When he asserts that 'the only effect of alternative



No voice for workers queuing at the DHSS office

candidates or abstentions will be a stronger Tory party in parliament' he is speaking the language of fear. And when he accuses those who argue for such a challenge of proposing 'an exclusively electoral answer to the Blair problem' he resorts to empty phrase-mongering.

Foot and Livingstone are indeed the conservatives the Red Action document describes in that they wish to conserve

Labour against any challenge. They have reached the farthest point that can be achieved by the radical middle class of which they are part, and that position is quite insufficient for the working class. The SWP's latest sticker has the question 'Do you hate the Tories?' in the boldest black on white. Underneath this is another question, this time in black on dark grey so it can be scarcely read: 'Are you worried by Blair?'. It summarises their standpoint: people should be 'worried' by Blair, and then only furtively; they should not hate him openly as a class enemy.

If either Foot or Livingstone had the slightest shred of political honesty, they would be supporting the Lib Dems who now stand to the left of New Labour. Perhaps it is a sign of the times that Red Ken is now on record as supporting an association with them - anything but joining with the working class. We have little doubt that within the SWP there must be those who question the craven support their leadership give to New Labour, especially when their internal assessment is that 'all the indications are that the electoral support, and possible membership emerges from the thoroughly rattled middle classes and not from the working class at all.'

Livingstone and Foot represent forces of the past bound completely to the 'Labour Movement'. The Red Action initiative is a pointer to the future. We cannot say whether it will succeed. But it does deserve support from all socialists, since it could represent a way forward particularly if it serves as a rallying point for existing campaigns and grass roots organisations in working class communities. And if it starts the process of challenging the left's support for Labour, it will serve a useful purpose. Robert Clough

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Sunday 8 October, 2pm
A celebration of Engels on the centenary of his death
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Sunday 5 November, 2pm
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Speaker: Carol Brickley

Sunday 10 December, 2pm
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All at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn). Entrance £1/50p. Creche available on application.

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Wednesday 22 November, 7.15pm
Why socialism?
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Call 0171 837 1688 for further details

RCG National Aggregate

In September, the RCG held its bimonthly meeting of its membership and close supporters to discuss major political issues and to take reports from the leadership of the organisation. This is a democratic meeting at which all members and invited supporters come together in open discussion.

The first session on Bosnia was introduced by Maxine Williams, who has written extensively on this subject in FRFI. The former Yugoslavia has been called the 'historic fault line of Europe'; yet under socialism it existed peacefully as a federal state with constitutional safeguards for minorities. With an estimated 250,000 killed, countless injured and millions with their homes and livelihoods destroyed, the death of socialism has been the death of Yugoslavia. Recently, it was revealed that the French and British agreement to German demands for the recogni-

tion of Croatia was a deal in return for opt-outs on the Maastricht Treaty. This is merely a continuation of the imperialist powers' games with the lives of the people of the Balkans. Sections of the British left have given support to one or other of the warring factions. The RCG sees no progressive force in the region that is exerting any influence. Maxine analyses the situation on page 4 of this issue of FRFI.

We were extremely pleased to welcome comrade Elif from Turkey for discussions with the RCG and to address the aggregate. In a brilliant speech she spoke of recent developments in Turkey, concentrating on the working class response to increasing state repression. Elif is part of a new, rapidly expanding party which sees the Kurdish national struggle as central to the working class struggle for socialism in Turkey.

All of us drew inspiration as we heard of the conditions under which the comrades from Turkey work in constant danger from state and fascist attack. Her analysis of Turkey's role as a bridge between the imperialists and the oppressed nations of the region was extremely thorough. Comrade Elif ended by inviting the RCG to send delegates to their conference in December.

In the afternoon, comrades from Birmingham, Manchester, Dundee, Lincoln and London discussed recent events in Cuba and our Rock around the Blockade campaign, with particular emphasis on mobilising for the forthcoming national demonstration against the US blockade - in spite of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign's apparent reluctance to do so! A fuller account of our work in solidarity with Cuba appears on pages 7-9.

The final session was devoted to our organisation. Robert Clough, author of *Labour: a party fit for imperialism* made an appeal for financial support for the group and gave encouraging figures for the sales of FRFI. If you can help us sell our paper and make a regular financial contribution to our work, then you could attend these meetings. Why not phone or write to find out how you can also be a member or supporter of the group. It's hard being a revolutionary communist at a time where the bourgeoisie are proclaiming that communism is dead and ideology (apart from theirs, of course) no longer exists. It's not all hard work, though. Direct links with revolutionaries in Turkey and political prisoners all over the world, the inspiration of Cuba - to say nothing of the wonderful social we held the evening before the meeting! - are just some of the compensations. The future of humanity is socialism: we are part of that future.

Richard Roques

LETTERS

write to FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX

Spread the idea

It was a surprise for me to see during the Edinburgh Festival a placard where I could read 'Hands off Cuba!' and people getting signatures against the blockade.

To be honest, first of all I wasn't sure what these people were working for. I mean, for or against Fidel. But after talking to them, I realised what it was all about. The thing is that even here in Spain, where there should be a feeling of brotherhood between us and the Cubans, you can see propaganda against Fidel Castro, above all on TV, in those sickening documentaries where they show you people escaping from Cuba, saying Fidel Castro is a dictator and all these things that governments want Cuban people to say, but nothing against the blockade and who is behind it. So I thought that in Britain there was a

connection with the US and that's why it was strange for me to find people working against the US blockade. But this confirms that real socialism needs to be between all the countries.

In my opinion, there is no point in blockading a country that made its own revolution that was successful just because the Cubans wanted it that way. Nobody can go against the will of a country and the wishes of its people.

Now, I'd like to ask something to the plain people: is there anything bad in socialism? Is there anything bad in cooperation? In everybody having enough to live properly? Wouldn't it be great to live in real socialism, in all ways - economic, social - caring for each other instead of falling in greed, the cancer of the capitalist system. And that's why those at the top want us to believe socialism is synonymous with misery

and poverty. But it is not - the blockade is synonymous with misery, poverty, greed and many more words like these.

I'd also like to mention Nicaragua. Why weren't the US government and its puppets in Western Europe interested in the success of the revolution? It was outside their borders, so why were they so worried? Maybe they were afraid if the Sandinistas succeeded, it would have been a great example for all oppressed countries in South America and in the whole world. But those at the top just want to keep on stealing the resources of the third world to make themselves richer and richer and these countries poorer and poorer.

This may sound depressing, but I think history is not going to stop - changes will come. We may not reach the light at the end of the tunnel but new generations may see it better - but someone has to start working, and

the most important thing is to get people aware of everything that is happening in education and culture. In the time of the dictatorship in Spain, Franco didn't want a good education for the working class. Why? You can guess. Good education and culture is the most dangerous thing for the capitalist system. They want people to be ignorant sheep and young people not to give a shit about anything and keep it going like that for ever. So people must be aware of that and be conscious that culture is the last weapon we have to fight against those powers. It is what makes us aware of the lies and cheats of the ruling class and social injustice. So let's move; let's make them see that we are not still. Let's spread the idea!

Viva Cuba libre y tropical! No pasaran!

JOAN BAYON TEIA
Barcelona, Spain

Australia's appalling record

At the end of your article 'Nuclear colonialism and nuclear racism' (FRFI 126) which was excellent, you had a list of 'what you can do'. This supported the call for a boycott of French products, specifically French wine, which I totally agree with. However, it also recommended buying Australian wine as a substitute, since Australia has broken off military relations with France in protest.

I strongly disagree with this position. The Australian government may oppose nuclear testing in the South Pacific, but it doesn't seem to mind genocide in East Timor by the

Indonesians (the Australians still collaborate with Suharto's murderous regime) and Australia's record on Aborigines' rights is appalling.

The Australian government's message seems to be, don't harm the environment for white Australians, but treat black people as you like. Whilst there may not be a specific boycott of Australian produce, I don't think it deserves a recommendation. Boycott French produce - use your own judgement to find a substitute.

DAVID HOWARTH
South London

Blair's ignorance

Watching Tony Blair's performance at a brief press conference in Ivy House on RTE News (4 September) after his meeting with Dick Spring confirmed how 'new' his party really is on Ireland.

Nothing has changed since Harold Wilson introduced the racist anti-Irish Prevention of Terrorism Act (1974), nor since Jim Callaghan appointed Roy Mason as Secretary of State for 'Northern' Ireland (1976-79), leaving a legacy of gross human rights violations, which culminated in the H-Block protests. Nor since 'new' leader Michael Foot delegated Don Concannon in 1981 to visit the dying Bobby Sands saying Labour did not support him. Nor since Kevin McNamara, former spokesperson on 'Northern' Ireland, who said of the Birmingham Six (while the campaign to free them was underway): 'Ordinary decent coppers using ordinary decent methods apprehended those responsible for the Birmingham outrages' (Hansard, 7 March 1983).

Nor under 'new' leader Neil Kinnock, whose party fully supported the murders of the Gibraltar Three in 1988, and whose foreign affairs spokesman George Robertson praised the murderers, saying, 'A major tragedy was averted. We've got to be glad about that.' (Murder on the Rock, Maxine Williams 1989)

In keeping with such a vile tradition Tony Blair now openly supports John Major's policies in refusing to release any political prisoners, enter all-party talks or meet with Gerry Adams, and insists on the surrender (decommissioning) of Republican weapons - policies that threaten the whole Peace Process.

Does this suppose that Blair knows better than John Hume, Bill Clinton, Nelson Mandela and John Bruton, all of whom have met and talked at length with Adams, and realise that talking is the only way to get real progress on the Peace Process?

New Labour me arse!

ANDY CONNOLLY, PRO
SEAMUS O MATHUNA, CHAIR
Saoirse, Navan

The horrors of prison

Thanks for the copy of *Strangeways 1990: a serious disturbance*. It was a tough read for me because it brought back memories of the physical abuse I have suffered from these people.

It was interesting, to say the least, and very informative. But most of all I admired the solidarity shown throughout. It's the first book I've ever read that is complete about the horrors of prison and those who keep its cogs in motion. Everyone I've passed the book around to said the same.

In continuous struggle,
RAPHAEL ROWE
HMP Maidstone

IN MEMORIAM

FRFI remembers IRA volunteer Ray McLaughlin who died on 9 September 1985, having spent 10 years in British gaols from 1975 to 1984. Throughout his life he fought as a Republican, a socialist and an internationalist.

We also salute the memory of Jim Reilly, Home Counties Organiser for Sinn Fein (Britain), who died on 6 September 1980. He devoted his life to the fight to free Ireland from British rule.

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Saturday 7 October
Assemble 12.30pm Hackney Downs
Park for march to Tottenham
police station via Stoke Newington
police station

London Saoirse FUNDRAISING SOCIAL EVENING

Thursday 12 October
the Victoria, Holloway Road,
London N7
Admission £3/£2

British Coalition for East Timor LONDON-BRISTOL SPONSORED CYCLE RIDE

10-12 October. To participate or help
tel: Hubert or Nicola 0181 761 9965

Society for Friendship with Korea REPORTBACK AND VIDEO BY DERMOT HUDSON

Friday 27 October 7pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London
WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn)

MEMORIAL MEETING FOR MAIRE O'SHEA

Speaker: Bernadette McAlliskey
Saturday 18 November, 2pm
Mechanics Institute,
Princess St, Manchester

Rock around the Blockade Events

CUBA SOLIDARITY EVENT

LONDON
Friday 13 October, 8pm
R&B BAND THE KISSING PIGS
PLAY A NIGHT FOR CUBA
at the Enterprise, Haverstock Hill, NW
(Chalk Farm tube) Admission £3/£2

Saturday 14 October
JOIN THE ROCK AROUND THE
BLOCKADE CONTINGENT ON
THE CSC 'HANDS OFF CUBA'
NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION
Meet 12 noon Marble Arch

Sunday 15 October
PLANNING MEETING
FOR ALL BRIGADISTAS
AND SUPPORTERS!
11am-3pm Conway Hall, Red Lion
Square, London WC1

Wednesday 18 October
CUBA VIVE! PUBLIC MEETING
WITH VIDEO
Venue to be confirmed
(tel: 0171 837 1688)

MANCHESTER
Wednesday 1 November 7.30pm
MEETING AND DISCUSSION
The Beerhouse, Angel St/Rochdale Rd
Manchester (near City Centre)

BIRMINGHAM
Saturday 21 October 12-2pm
STALL FOR CUBA

Top of New Street (near 'Shared Earth'
cafe) followed by video and discussion

POWs' birthdays

Sean McNulty CL3440
HMP Full Sutton, Moor Lane,
York, YO4 1PS 13 October
Harry Duggan 338638,
HMP Frankland, Finchale Ave
Brasside, Durham, DH1 5YD
31 October
Sean Kinsella 758661
HMP Full Sutton 5 November
Brendan Dowd 758662
HMP Whitmoor, Longhill
Road, March, Cambs, PE15 0P
17 November

**FIGHT
RACISM!
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HOUSING CRISIS

Everyone has the right to expect a decent and secure home. Yet capitalism has always failed to provide it, and for the working class today there is an acute housing crisis. JIM CRAVEN reports.

All I want is a room somewhere

even the £4 billion-plus given to home-owners each year through mortgage tax-relief. In fact any revolutionary government could largely solve the problem overnight, for there are an estimated 800,000 surplus dwellings in Britain, either vacant or second homes, not to mention all the empty office blocks and sprawling mansions.

So it cannot be claimed that the capitalist state has ever made a serious attempt to tackle the housing problem. The present bunch have described homelessness as 'a short-term crisis' which can be solved by the market. They wish only for capitalists to make as much profit as possible from housing whilst spending as little public money on it. Constant attempts to cut public spending, and with it state responsibility for housing, have been accompanied by vicious attempts to blame the homeless for their own situation and to persuade council tenants that their only way out of the mess is to buy. Hence, last year local authorities built just 528 new homes compared with 55,000 in 1981. Over the same period new private sector dwellings rose from 115,000 to 130,000 but fluctuated vastly depending on the profit to be made; reaching a peak of nearly 200,000 homes in 1988.

Between 1981 and 1991 owner occupation rose from 56.6 per cent to 67.7 per cent while those who rented council homes fell from 30.3 per cent to 21.8 per cent. Much of the change was due to the 'Right to Buy' scheme which encouraged council tenants to buy their homes by offering substan-

tial discounts. Over 1.4 million council properties had been sold off under the scheme by the end of 1992. In 1988, in an attempt to make private renting more attractive and profitable for landlords private rents were deregulated and short-term tenancies introduced. And over the past 15 years a host of other initiatives have been introduced, all with the intention of supporting the move away from council housing and toward the private sector - City Grants, Housing Action Trusts, Flats Over Shops Initiatives, Rent-a-Room Scheme, the HAMA programme and the transfer of council houses en masse to housing associations.

The Housing White Paper

The new White Paper on housing, published in June, points the way to even greater suffering for the homeless and badly-housed sections of the working class. The government proposes to severely weaken local authorities' duties to provide emergency help for homeless people. Councils will have discretion to refuse temporary accommodation even in priority cases and to oblige families to take private tenancies if necessary in some other part of the country. At the same time it will be made easier for private landlords to insist on short-term tenancies and to evict families for rent arrears. Yet the government is also restricting the amount of housing benefit that tenants can claim.

On top of this, a massive increase of 1.5 million home-owners is planned for the next decade, many of

them under the extension of the 'Right to Buy' scheme to include Housing Association tenants as well. However, income support for mortgage interest payments for unemployed home-owners is to be cut and mandatory renovation grants for low-income owner-occupiers are to be scrapped. Social housing (council and housing association properties) is to be privatised wherever possible with council housing being largely transferred to Housing Associations or private housing companies. Meanwhile a growing proportion of the Housing Association programme will be devoted to home-ownership schemes, private companies are to be given access to Housing Association grants and institutional investors in private renting are to be offered tax breaks.

The outlook is bleak. Many homeless families desperately seeking help from a local authority will be offered no more than a list of private lodgings. If they find a decent home it is likely to be at a high rent. But if it is higher than the local average, their housing benefit will be cut under the new proposals. The result is that they are likely to fall into arrears and the landlord can simply evict them. If they escape eviction it is probable they will have only a six month tenancy before they have to move on. Even those given temporary accommodation by a council under the new proposals can be told to move on after 12 months. In order to get by, more and more people will be forced to opt for the cheapest and poorest quality accommodation. It will prove

conclusively that under capitalism the only people who can be assured of a decent and secure home will be the rich and affluent middle class.

Housing and the Labour Party

So what would the Labour Party do? Although their plans are utterly vague, it is evident they will only tinker with the present system. There is certainly no commitment to end homelessness. When asked in a recent interview if Labour would commit itself to build the 100,000 extra homes needed each year Labour spokesperson on housing Nick Raynsford said (read carefully): 'Our targets will certainly give an indication of numbers. It may not be absolutely precise' about this, but we will certainly give an indication of the order of magnitude of our programme.' And when asked if rent levels will rise or fall in Labour's first term of office, he replied 'I would certainly want affordability indicators in all housing sectors.'

Such empty flannel sounds just like Peter Sellers' brilliant 1960 parody of a political speech, where the orator does not 'regard existing conditions likely', but could 'state quite categorically that I am more than sensible of the definition of the precise issues which are at this very moment concerning us all. We must build, but we must build surely', and concludes: 'But does this mean, I hear your cry, that we can no longer look forward to the future that is to come? Certainly not!'

We do know for certain that New Labour will not stop the sale of council houses. It won't even launch any new initiative to help those sleeping out on the streets other than that suggested by Jack Straw - getting them cleared away by the police. But New Labour will consider tax breaks for private landlords. As a capitalist party their solution is the same as that of the Tories. The City lends huge amounts of money for housing projects, banks and building societies have billions invested in mortgages. Labour politicians know who their masters are and anyway their houses all have four bedrooms. As Steven Bell, Chief Economist at Morgan Grenfell, said after the interview with Nick Raynsford, 'I have been enormously impressed'. So, Labour might give a leg-up to some of their middle



Families blighted by appalling housing conditions and lack of amenities

class voters but for the bulk of the working class the hope of decent and secure housing without threat of unpayable rents and eviction can only be met by socialism. ■